

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

A FRAMEWORK FOR ALIGNING MARKETING STRATEGIES WITH COMPETITIVE POSITIONING: A CASE OF SUPERFERT FERTILIZER COMPANY

BY

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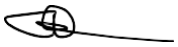
Student Name Tapiwa Namakawa Signature:  Date: 23 July 2026

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DECLARATION

I, Tapiwa Namakawa Student Reg Number B227806A, do hereby declare that this dissertation is a result of my own investigation and research, except to the extent indicated in the acknowledgments, bibliography, references, and comments included in the body of the report, and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree to any other university.

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23 July 2026

DEDICATION

To my wife Newlearn, sons Nathan, Samuel and daughter Victoria for their support, endurance and patience during the time of my study as I could not spare them the quality time they deserve.

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ABSTRACT

The overarching aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a framework for aligning marketing strategies with competitive positioning of fertiliser companies, using Superfert Fertiliser Company in Zimbabwe as a case study. The study was guided by the following objectives: to examine the product strategy initiatives implemented by Superfert and their efficacy as determinants of market competitiveness, to evaluate the impact of Superfert's marketing strategies on selected competitive performance metrics together with its overall market standing and to ascertain the most critical marketing mix factors that exert the most substantial impact on Superfert's competitive positioning. Reviews of literature show that competitiveness emerges from strategy execution within a complex business environment. The moderating role of marketing strategies and their impact on competitive outcome is fundamental in influencing businesses' competitiveness. Empirical studies on marketing strategies have called for research that links product, pricing, promotion and distribution to the overall performance of the firms, more specifically, sales, customer and sales performance. The research adopts a mixed-methods approach. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews, engaging a sample of 60 customers and insights from management within Superfert, with 75% of respondents agreeing that Superfert's fertilizers are of high quality, 65% of respondents considering competitive prices and reflective of value received. The research reveals an impactful role of product and promotion offerings as competitiveness determinants, highlighting their crucial roles in the success of fertiliser firms. Demographic analysis indicates that female respondents and individuals aged 31 to 40 comprised significant target customer segments for Superfert's marketing strategies. The product strategy came out as a major driver of competitiveness, confirming its criticality in the fertilizer market. The study concludes that effective implementation of marketing strategies is imperative for enhancing customer loyalty. The research recommendations emphasize the needful improvement of communication, customer service training, and service recovery mechanisms to overcome barriers to retention. These findings offer valuable perspectives for other firms navigating the complexities of the agricultural sector in Zimbabwe and contribute to theoretical advancements in marketing strategy frameworks.

Keywords: marketing strategies, Superfert, Fertiliser Company, Zimbabwe

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CHAPTER ONE -INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The fertiliser industry serves a vital role in driving agricultural productivity, ensuring food security, and contributing to the economic development of Zimbabwe (NDS1, 2021–2025). Agricultural sector is a principal driver of national development, representing a significant portion of the country's Gross Domestic Product and employing a substantial portion of the Zimbabwean rural population.

Fertiliser companies In Zimbabwe operate in a sector that influences rural livelihoods, agricultural output, and the broader agro-industrial value chain. Amidst fluctuating market conditions and evolving customer and consumer needs, marketing strategy formulation and implementation has emerged as a crucial success determining factor for organizational sustained growth and survival (Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, 2022).

The ability of firms to effectively implement marketing strategies enhances competitiveness, particularly in the fertiliser industry, where product differentiation is often limited. The marketing mix consisting of product, price, promotion, and distribution offerings shapes customer perceptions, builds brand equity and is essential for sustaining competitive advantage. Companies that adopt comprehensive and customer specific needs driven marketing strategies often achieve superior performance evident in Zimbabwe's competitive fertiliser sector.

The fertiliser sector in Zimbabwe faces a plethora of diverse challenges that include a perpetual influx of regional and international suppliers and competitors, currency instability constraints and infrastructural limitations. At the face of such, firms in the industry have to innovate in terms of product capabilities as well as in their market positioning and outreach efforts. Traditional marketing models, which were developed in more stable market contexts, may fail to capture and apply in the unique structural and contextual constraints local firms face. Local fertiliser companies are increasingly depending on designing and executing marketing strategies that resonate with their specific environment. Superfert Fertiliser Company, a notable local manufacturer,

provides an ideal case study for exploring the influence of marketing strategies on firm's competitiveness.

This study sought to assess how Superfert's marketing strategies impact its competitiveness, while enhancing the understanding of how such practices can be generalized to optimization to improve performance, customer satisfaction, and market share within Zimbabwe's fertiliser industry.

1.2 Background to the study

The global production and supply of fertiliser raw materials is highly concentrated in few geographic regions. This situation predisposes countries in non fertiliser production regions to non-competitive pricing behavior. Sub-Saharan Africa region is heavily dependent on imported fertiliser raw materials, making it highly vulnerable to international price shocks causing high domestic fertilizer prices that are often not aligned with the international market prices especially in developing countries.

Fertiliser is an essential input that bolter crop yields, thereby reinforcing national food security and underpinning the socio-economic resilience of rural communities. In Zimbabwe, where agriculture is a major economic performance driver, the fertiliser value chain plays a critical role in driving industrial growth, generating employment, and stabilizing the growing economy.

Despite this importance, the Zimbabwean fertiliser sector face continued chronic underperformance factors marked by persistent structural challenges. Currently, local producers are estimated to meet only about 15% of the national demand, producing approximately 90,000 metric tons annually against a demand of about 780,000 metric tons (National Competitiveness Commission, 2021). Limited access to foreign currency for importation of key raw materials, inadequate working capital reserves, persistent power outages, and high- capital costs hamper production efforts thus rendering Zimbabwe to heavily rely on imported fertilizers. This reliance undermines efforts to attain self-sufficiency status and further put pressure on low foreign currency reserves.

Traditionally, local fertiliser companies operated at higher capacity rates. The liberalization and deregulation of the market have intensified competition from duty-free imports offered at lower prices. Major players, such as the Zimbabwe Fertiliser Company (ZFC), Sable Chemicals, and Windmill, have reported steady declining output and profitability. Production facilities such as ZFC's Msasa plant, have reportedly closed entirely due to these pressures. Aging infrastructure, energy disruptions, and logistical constraints have negatively impacted marketing efficiencies by escalating production costs, these have ripple effects on compromised economies of scales and resultantly made local fertilizers less competitive in comparison to imports. As a result, many farmers, particularly smallholders, have migrated towards cheaper imported alternatives and reduced their use of local products, which diminishes demand further.

In this challenging operational landscape, effective marketing strategies are vital survival mechanisms. Conventional marketing frameworks, that have applied well especially in stable markets, need to be adapted to Zimbabwe's volatile economic conditions. Fertiliser companies must tailor their pricing, promotional, and distribution offerings to navigate numerous constraints, including foreign exchange shortages and shifting farmer behaviors.

Superfert Fertiliser Company exemplifies the need for innovative marketing within this complex industrial environment. The company relies on high-quality products and production capacity and a combination of marketing strategies to maintain its competitive standing. The company is tasked with tailoring its pricing, ensuring effective distribution to remote areas, differentiating its fertiliser blends to accommodate various crops and soil types, and promoting its brand to foster customer trust and loyalty. Regardless of these efforts, the company remains uncertain whether these marketing strategies will suffice to overcome the disadvantages posed by production costs, limited scale, and import competition.

While existing literature outlines critical constraints influencing fertiliser production in Zimbabwe including underutilized capacity and infrastructural deficiencies, there is a notable lack of empirical research regarding the effects of marketing strategies on competitiveness. Much of the existing studies focus on production or supply-side challenges only, overlooking the impact of marketing effectiveness. This present study

was carried out with the aim to bridge this gap by assessing how marketing strategies influence Superfert's competitiveness, providing insights pertinent to participants in the fertiliser market, policymakers, and scholarly discussions on marketing strategies within resource-constrained environments.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Ideally, the companies within the Zimbabwean fertiliser industry should operate efficiently, effectively market their offerings and maintain sustainable profitability while nurturing customer retention to contribute significantly to national food security (FAO, 2021). However, the contemporary market landscape remains precarious, local fertiliser manufacturers are burdened with competing cheaper, duty-free import substitutes while contending with severe economic volatility marked by inflation and fluctuating exchange rates that disrupt pricing structures and profitability (Hanke & Kwok, 2009).

Infrastructural deficiencies coupled with unpredictable access to rural and remote markets and regulatory challenges, further complicates efficient distribution and marketing efforts. The combined cumulative effects of these constraints create a theoretical ambiguity regarding the practical applicability of conventional marketing models, such as the well-known 4Ps framework, which presumes cost predictability and rational consumer behavior conditions often absent in Zimbabwe's context.

Marketing interventions within the fertiliser sector have been focusing on individual tactics such as promotional activities or pricing adjustments. Few studies have examined the impacts of these marketing approaches on firms' overall competitiveness. This fragmented method hampers the efforts to ascertain the combination of marketing facets most significantly enhance firm performance in unpredictable environments. It is critical to empirically investigate the impact of cohesive marketing strategies on measurable outcomes related to competitiveness, such as market share, profitability, and customer engagement.

This study intended to address this gap by exploring how Superfert implements the 4Ps of marketing to enhance its competitive position while navigating systemic economic and infrastructural challenges.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to undertake a comprehensive and explanatory investigation into how marketing strategies influence sustainable competitive performance within Zimbabwe's fertiliser industry, with particular emphasis on Superfert Fertiliser Company. This research aims to analyze how the coordinated application of the four elements of the marketing mix affects the selected key organizational performance indicators. These indicators include market share growth, sales performance, operational profitability, customer acquisition, and long-term customer engagement.

Through an empirical evaluation of these strategic components, the study sought to establish the extent to which marketing efforts contribute to Superfert's competitive standing in a highly volatile and contested market environment. Beyond the empirical dimension, this study was designed to generate practical, evidence-based recommendations that can guide managerial decision-making within Superfert and similar organizations operating in resource-constrained contexts. The insights derived are expected to support more efficient allocation of resources, improved strategy formulation, and strengthened market positioning in the fertiliser sector. Given the increasing pressure from low-cost imported fertilizers, currency volatility issues and fluctuating input costs, this research aimed at highlighting marketing approaches that can help firms build resilience and maintain competitiveness despite systemic challenges.

From an academic and theoretical perspective, this study contributes to ongoing debates surrounding the applicability of classical marketing theories, particularly the 4Ps and integrated marketing strategy frameworks, in markets characterized by economic instability, limited access to capital, and unpredictable consumer behavior. By contextualizing these frameworks within Zimbabwe's unique socio-economic environment, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how marketing strategies can be adapted to address real-world constraints such as inconsistent input supply chains, varied farmer literacy levels, and limited distribution infrastructure.

The ultimate purpose of this study is to support sustainable organizational growth for companies in the fertiliser sector in Zimbabwe while simultaneously contributing to

wider national priorities. By improving the effectiveness of marketing strategies in the fertiliser sector, the study indirectly enhances agricultural productivity, promotes food security, and strengthens the agricultural value chain. The outcomes of the research therefore hold significance not only for Superfert but also for policymakers, agricultural stakeholders, and scholars seeking to deepen understanding of marketing strategy effectiveness in emerging economies.

1.5 Research Objectives

Main Objective

The overarching aim of this study was to determine the effects of marketing strategies on the competitive dynamics and market performance of Superfert Fertiliser Company.

Specific Objectives

1. To examine the product strategy initiatives implemented by Superfert and their efficacy as a determinant of market competitiveness.
2. To evaluate the impact of Superfert's marketing strategies on its competitive performance metrics and overall market standing.
3. To ascertain the most critical marketing mix factors that exert the most substantial impact on Superfert's competitive positioning.

1.6 Research Questions

1. How does Superfert implement product strategies to enhance its competitiveness?
2. What is the impact of Superfert’s marketing strategies on selected market performance indicators.
3. Which elements of the marketing mix most significantly influence Superfert’s competitive position in the Zimbabwean fertiliser sector?

1.7 Hypotheses

Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between marketing strategies and competitiveness.

Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between marketing strategies and competitiveness.

1.8 Significance of the Study

For the fertiliser industry practitioners, the findings will provide evidence-based insights into the most impactful elements of the marketing mix, thereby assisting in informed decision-making, resource allocation efficiency, and improved customer engagement amid volatile fertiliser market conditions.

Investors and new entrants into the fertiliser market can gain strategic insights that help avoid pitfalls and navigate the complexities of Zimbabwe's fertiliser sector, thereby mitigating investment and business operational risks.

For policymakers and regulators, the conclusion of this study informs initiatives aimed at enhancing market efficiency, improving farmer access to vital agricultural inputs, and contributing to national food security objectives.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to theoretical adaptations by demonstrating how established marketing frameworks, such as the 4Ps and Porter's Competitive advantage theory, can be contextualized within resource-constrained economies. The findings thus address a critical gap in current literature and provide a foundation for future research.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

A significant obstacle encountered during the research process was the restricted access to confidential marketing and operational data pertaining to Superfert Fertiliser Company. Specifically, the stringent confidentiality policies in place rendered challenging to obtain detailed information regarding pricing strategies, sales figures, and internal processes. To overcome this limitation, formal permissions were duly

secured by the company's management, and stringent ethical measures were implemented to ensure the safeguarding of sensitive information. Consequently, data was collected in an aggregated form, thereby facilitating meaningful analysis whilst maintaining the requisite level of confidentiality.

The study's case specific focuses on Superfert Fertiliser Company, whilst enabling a detailed examination of its marketing strategies and competitive dynamics, inherently limiting the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. To mitigate this limitation, the researcher has supplemented the primary data with secondary sources, including industry reports, competitor analyses, and relevant scholarly literature, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the broader Zimbabwean fertiliser sector and the challenges to competitiveness therein

Despite these limitations, the methodological rigor, ethical data handling, and triangulation strategies adopted ensure the findings remain valid, reliable, and pertinent. The encountered challenges reflect real-world constraints in conducting research within a dynamic and resource-constrained environment, and the strategies employed strengthen the study’s credibility while imparting valuable lessons for future investigations.

1.10 Delimitations of the Study

The study sought to investigate the relationship between marketing strategies and the competitive positioning of Superfert Fertiliser Company. The scope of the study is confined to the company's marketing strategies and their impact on its competitive positioning within the Zimbabwean market. Data collection was limited to Superfert Fertiliser Company and secondary sources, including industry reports and scholarly literature. By delimiting the study to these specific areas, the researcher aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the relationship between marketing strategies and competitive positioning in the context of Superfert Fertiliser Company, whilst acknowledging the potential limitations of the study's scope and generalizability.

The respondent categories were grouped into customers and management and employees in the marketing and agronomy departments of the organization. Customers were chosen as the target population to get an understanding of customer views on

various product perceptions. Management in the Sales and marketing and Agronomy department was chosen as these departments are responsible for marketing activities and thereby being more knowledgeable on marketing and distributions aspects of fertiliser. The study is limited to the period from 2018 to 2022, and the data collected pertains to this timeframe.

1.11 Chapter Summary

Zimbabwe's fertiliser industry is strategically important to the national economy, yet its persistent challenges significantly affect firm competitiveness. The problem statement identifies both theoretical and practical gaps, justifying this study. With well-defined research objectives, questions, and hypotheses guiding the empirical investigation, the significance, limitations, and delimitations ensure methodological robustness and contextual relevance. This chapter lays a strong foundation for Chapter Two, which will critically examine the existing literature on marketing strategies, competitiveness, and the unique dynamics of Zimbabwe's fertiliser industry.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter offers a comprehensive and critical review of academic, professional, and sector-specific literature examining the relationship between marketing strategies and firm competitiveness, particularly within the fertiliser industry. The review synthesizes theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and practical insights, establishing a robust conceptual foundation for the investigation. By examining the fertiliser sector in the context of economic volatility, infrastructural constraints, operational logistics, and agronomic requirements, this chapter elucidates the intricate interplay between strategic marketing decisions and the attainment of superior competitive outcomes. Additionally, this chapter develops a theoretical and conceptual framework that integrates established marketing and business management theories, providing a structured lens for empirical analysis. Drawings from literature in both developed and developing contexts, the insights presented here situate this study within Zimbabwe's unique economic and agricultural environment, thereby laying the groundwork for comprehending how fertiliser firms can bolster market performance and reinforce long-term competitiveness.

2.1 Definitions of Key Concepts

2.1.1 Marketing Strategy

Marketing strategy entails the coordinated and goal-oriented planning and execution of business decisions aimed at achieving marketing objectives, such as optimizing resource allocation, maximizing customer acquisition and retention, and achieving market differentiation (Darsana et al., 2023; Ratna et al., 2023). According to Porter (1985), strategy involves choosing a distinct set of cohesive offerings that provide a unique value proposition. Practically, this entails aligning product offerings, pricing, distribution, and promotional efforts to satisfy the diverse market needs while leveraging internal organizational capabilities. Effective marketing strategies empower firms to target valuable customer segments, build enduring brands, and respond proactively to competitive pressures, thereby ensuring resilience in volatile markets (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

2.1.2 Competitiveness

Competitiveness refers to a firm's ability to sustain superior performance relative to industry rivals. This includes delivering exceptional value to customers, maintaining agility, fostering innovation, and cultivating lasting customer loyalty (Sharples & Milham, 2019; Blunck, 2016). Within the fertiliser industry context, competitiveness is not only determined and impacted by production efficiency but also marketing effectiveness plays a similar role. This encompasses differentiating products, ensuring market accessibility, establishing transparent pricing, and educating farmers regarding optimal product use.

2.2 Marketing Strategies in the Fertiliser Industry

The fertiliser industry, particularly in developing economies, mandates highly adaptive marketing strategies, primarily due to its capital-intensive nature, dependence on regulated global inputs, and the close ties to agricultural volatility. Literature studies have consistently identified critical importance of the four elements of the marketing mix product, price, place, and promotion as crucial strategic levers (McCarthy, 1960).

2.2.1 Product Strategy

Product offering in the fertiliser sector extends beyond basic product formulation to also include after sale services and strategic packaging. Fertiliser firms must tailor make their product offerings to meet a multiplicity of farmer agronomic needs, evolving from simple single-nutrient products (such as the traditional nitrogen and phosphate) to specialty blends, compound fertilizers (NPK), and micronutrient-inclusive formulations. This product differentiation is essential for addressing the specific soil and crop requirements of small-scale and farmers in developing countries, improving adoption rates and reducing fertiliser wastage through precise application regimes (Kotler & Keller, 2016; FAO, 2006). Product strategy also includes ensuring quality consistency and providing user-friendly, tamper-proof packaging suited for rural logistics.

2.2.2 Competitive Strategy

According to Ireland, Huskisson and Hitt (2015:4) that strategic competitiveness is achieved when a firm successfully formulates and implements a value-creating strategy. A strategy is an integrated and coordinated set of commitments and actions designed to exploit core competencies and gain a competitive advantage. When choosing a strategy, firms make choices among competing alternatives as the pathway for deciding how they will pursue strategic competitiveness. In this sense, the chosen strategy indicates what the firm will do as well as what the firm will not do.

Cahyanto & Hilal (2013) expressed in their research that according to Michael Porter's Five Forces, the tool that is used to analyze how a competitive environment will affect the marketing of a product. This tool is simple but very powerful to understand the situation of the current business. It also helps us to understand the advantages of the current competition position and what will be faced later. So, the companies can increase their strengths and anticipate their weaknesses to avoid making wrong decisions. Conventionally, this tool can be used to identify whether a new product, service or business generates profit for the company. Besides, this tool is also very helpful to understand the balance of forces that are influential in the business situation being faced. Wheelen and Hunger (2018:207) mentioned that Michael Porter proposed three "generic" competitive strategies for outperforming other organizations in a particular industry: overall cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. These strategies are called generic because they can be pursued by any type or size of business firm, even by not-for-profit organizations.

Porter also proposed that a firm's competitive advantage in an industry is determined by its competitive scope, that is, the breadth of the company's or business unit's target market. Simply put, a company or business unit can choose a broad target (aim at the middle of the mass market) or a narrow target (aim at a market niche). Combining these two types of target market with the three competitive strategies results in four variations of generic strategies, as mentioned follows:

Cost Leadership is the ability of a company or a business unit to design, produce, and market a comparable product or service more efficiently than its competitors. - Differentiation is the ability of a company to provide unique and superior value to the

buyer. This may include areas such as product quality, special features, or after-sales service.

Cost Focus is the ability of a company to provide a competitive low-cost strategy to a particular buyer group or geographic market and attempts to serve only this niche.

Differentiation Focus is the ability of a company to provide unique and superior value to a particular buyer group or geographical market and attempt to serve the special needs of a narrow strategic target more effectively than can its competition.

2.3 Fertiliser Industry Structure and Competitive Context in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean national fertiliser value chain exhibits systemic structural constraints tied to heavy import dependency, chronic production inefficiencies, and profound infrastructure challenges. According to the National Competitiveness Commission (NCC)'s 2022 Fertilizer Value Chain Competitiveness Report, major challenges include a high foreign currency import bill for raw materials, dilapidated rail infrastructure hindering bulk transport, and an ongoing necessity for foreign currency to procure raw materials.

Moreover, challenges associated with distribution and regulation lead to substantial pricing disparities across regions, undermining equity and access. A report by the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) documented large differences in fertiliser prices across farming districts, highlighting the acute failure of the Place (Distribution) strategy to achieve market efficiency and access for smallholder farmers (NewsDay Zimbabwe). This underscores the notion that in Zimbabwe, macroeconomic policy and infrastructure gaps function as powerful mediating variables that either amplify or diminish the effectiveness of a firm's marketing strategies. This information suggests that fertiliser marketing strategies must be designed not solely for a competitive market but also for an institutionally fragile environment.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in established marketing and business theories that provide insight into the relationship between marketing strategies and competitive advantage. The following frameworks are instrumental:

2.4.1 Porter's Five Forces Model

Michael Porter's theory of Competitive Advantage argues that firms can achieve sustainable, superior profitability by adopting one of three generic strategies which are Cost Leadership, Differentiation, or Focus (Porter, 1985). This theory provides the essential dependent variable construct for the study, defining what competitiveness is and how it can be achieved. In the context of the Zimbabwean fertiliser industry, straightforward cost leadership is challenging due to high import costs, making success largely dependent on a differentiation strategy, often manifested through innovative products (e.g., crop-specific or fortified fertilizers), superior reliability or unparalleled customer education. A Focus strategy might involve specifically addressing the credit and volume needs of smallholder farmers. These theories underpin the study by explaining how marketing strategies conceptualized through the marketing mix can contribute to measurable competitive outcomes when aligned with operational and market realities.

2.4.2 Market Orientation Theory

Market orientation theory, developed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990), suggests that a company's ability to create and deliver value to customers is a key driver of competitiveness. The theory posits that market-oriented companies are more likely to achieve superior performance and sustain a competitive advantage.

The market orientation framework consists of three key components:

The market orientation framework can be applied to fertiliser firms in Zimbabwe to improve competitiveness in several ways:

Customer Orientation: Fertiliser companies can focus on understanding the needs of Zimbabwean farmers, such as improving crop yields and reducing environmental impact (Mashingaidze, 2013).

Competitor Orientation: Fertiliser companies can analyze the actions of their competitors, such as pricing strategies and product offerings, to identify opportunities to differentiate themselves (Chikobvu, 2015).

Inter-functional Coordination: Fertiliser companies can ensure that all departments and functions work together to create value for customers, such as providing technical support and training to farmers (Munyanyi, 2017).

Benefits of Market Orientation

Improved Customer Satisfaction: By understanding and meeting the needs of customers, fertiliser companies can improve customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

Increased Market Share: By differentiating themselves from competitors, fertiliser companies can increase their market share (Chikobvu, 2015).

Enhanced Competitiveness: By adopting a market-oriented approach, fertiliser companies can enhance their competitiveness and sustain a competitive advantage (Mashingaidze, 2013)

Value Chain Analysis: A Framework for Competitiveness in Fertiliser Firms

Value Chain Analysis (VCA) is a strategic management tool developed by Porter (1985) to analyze a company's activities and identify opportunities to create value and improve competitiveness. In the context of fertiliser firms, VCA can be applied to identify areas where companies can reduce costs, improve efficiency, and increase customer value.

2.4.3 The Value Chain Framework

The value chain framework consists of primary activities and support activities.

Primary Activities:

Inbound Logistics: Fertiliser companies can analyze their inbound logistics activities, such as sourcing raw materials, managing inventory, and transporting inputs, to identify opportunities to reduce costs and improve efficiency (Porter, 1985).

Operations: VCA can be applied to analyze the production process, including manufacturing, quality control, and testing, to identify areas for improvement (Kotler, 2017).

Outbound Logistics: Fertiliser companies can analyze their outbound logistics activities, such as warehousing, transportation, and delivery, to identify opportunities to improve customer service and reduce costs (Christopher, 2016).

Marketing and Sales: VCA can be applied to analyze marketing and sales activities, such as advertising, promotion, and pricing, to identify opportunities to increase customer awareness and demand (Kotler, 2017).

Service: Fertiliser companies can analyze their service activities, such as customer support, training, and maintenance, to identify opportunities to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty (Rust et al., 2004).

Support Activities:

Procurement: VCA can be applied to analyze procurement activities, such as sourcing raw materials and negotiating contracts, to identify opportunities to reduce costs and improve efficiency (Porter, 1985).

Technology Development: Fertiliser companies can analyze their technology development activities, such as research and development, to identify opportunities to improve product quality and innovation (Schumpeter, 1934).

Infrastructure: Fertiliser companies can analyze their infrastructure activities, such as facilities management and maintenance, to identify opportunities to reduce costs and improve efficiency (Porter, 1985).

Applicability to Fertiliser Firms in Zimbabwe

The value chain framework can be applied to fertiliser firms in Zimbabwe to improve competitiveness in several ways:

Cost Reduction: VCA can help fertiliser companies identify opportunities to reduce costs, such as streamlining logistics and improving operational efficiency (Christopher, 2016).

Differentiation: VCA can help fertiliser companies differentiate themselves from competitors by identifying opportunities to create unique value for customers, such as offering customized products or services (Porter, 1985).

Improved Customer Service: VCA can help fertiliser companies improve customer service by identifying opportunities to improve delivery times, product quality, and customer support (Rust et al., 2004).

Innovation: VCA can help fertiliser companies identify opportunities for innovation, such as developing new products or services, improving production processes, or adopting new technologies (Schumpeter, 1934).

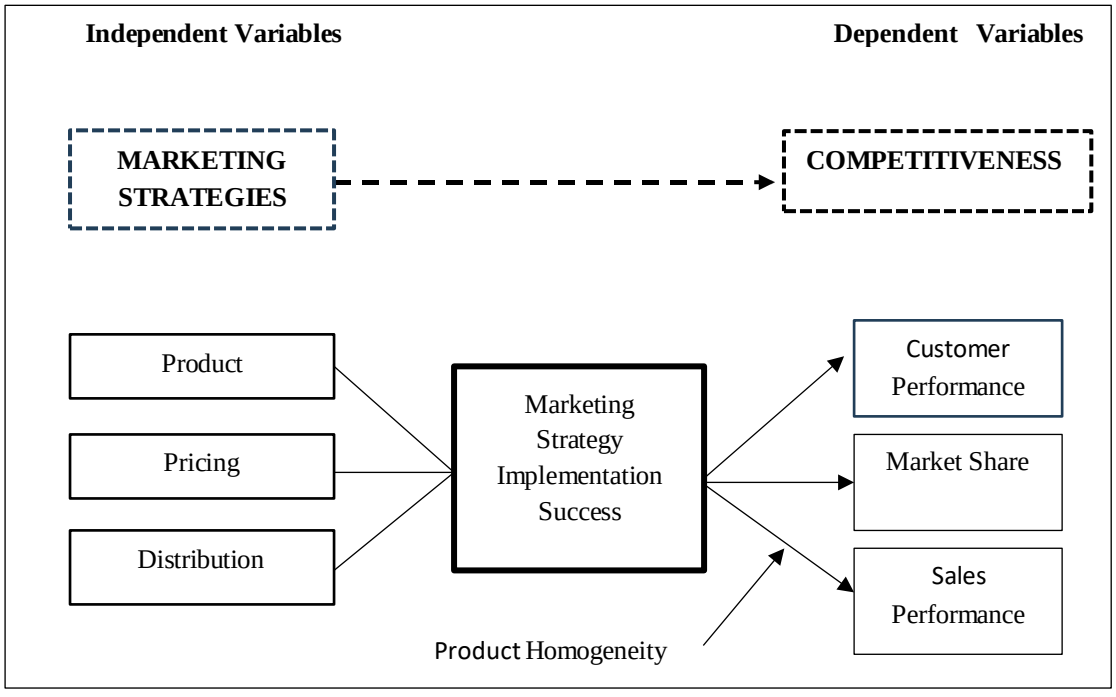
Zimbabwean Context

The fertiliser industry in Zimbabwe is a crucial component of the country's agricultural sector, with a projected growth rate of 2.40% by 2027 (6Wresearch, 2023). The industry is driven by increasing adoption of modern farming techniques, government initiatives to promote sustainable agriculture, and growing demand for high-quality crops (National Competitiveness Commission, 2022).

2.6 Conceptual Framework

This section presents the conceptual framework that informs this study. It synthesizes the interactions between marketing strategies (the 4Ps) and competitive outcomes (market share, profitability, and customer loyalty). The framework shows how effective implementation of marketing strategies could enhance competitiveness, represented visually to show the interconnectedness of strategies and outcomes.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Depicted on the conceptual framework is an illustration which is founded on perspectives from 4Ps model. The framework highlights that competitiveness is not solely the result of isolated marketing tactics but emerges from strategy execution within a complex operational environment. Furthermore, the model illustrates the moderating role of marketing strategies and its impact on competitive outcome, influencing firm Performance. Recent studies on marketing strategies have called for research that links product, pricing, promotion and distribution standardization to the overall performance of the firm, more specifically, the firm's sales, customer and sales performance. This research operationalizes the effects of product homogeneity and examines its relationship with firm competitiveness.

2.7 Product Homogeneity

Previous studies have stressed the significance of homogeneous product characteristics on sales performance and showed there is an impact on a firm's ability to standardize effectively (Chandra, Griffith, and Ryans 2002). However, the impact of product homogeneity characteristics on the standardization and firm performance relationship is strong, as customers perceive the products as interchangeable (Greenstein 2004; Pelham 1997; Bakos 1997; Robinson, Clarke-Hill, and Clarkson 2002). It is found that high degree of product homogeneity characteristics occurs in an increasing number of diverse industries including the fertiliser sector (Olson and Sharma 2008; Greenstein 2004; Sharma and Sheth 2004). Product homogeneity is considered an important phenomenon of marketing strategy toward sales performance (Heil and Helsen 2001; Unger 1983). We can, therefore, posit that when there are minor product differences in the market whereby some products are offered by competitors and homogeneity is high, in that case standardization is regarded as a stronger performance alternative because useful adaptations may be difficult to develop by firms. According to Rangan and Bowman (1992), homogeneous products are mainly marketed based on price. Therefore, a standardization strategy may provide crucial cost saving advantages and thus increase firm performance. We can, therefore, posit that firms that operate in industries with homogeneous products can leverage and benefit largely from their sales performance.

2.8 Chapter Summary

The review identified a critical gap in existing literature. While there is ample global theory, few studies empirically examine these relationships within Zimbabwe's fertiliser industry, particularly against its unique set of macroeconomic and structural constraints. By situating this study within the context of Superfert and employing the articulated Conceptual Framework, the research is designed to fill this void, offering evidence-based insights that can guide managerial decision-making and enhance the performance of fertiliser firms operating in similar developing economies.

CHAPTER THREE - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature of earlier authors. In this chapter, I will review the techniques. Wegner (2020) asserts that methodology pertains to the gathering, arrangement, and evaluation of information. According to Quincy (2020), it is an intelligible group of complimentary approaches that may be customized to yield findings that tackle research problems and relate to the goals of the study. Methodology is the term used to describe a set of rules, regulations, and principles utilized in research. It matters because it clarifies the methodology that will be used for the study. The study approach, which describes how the investigation will be conducted, is explained in this chapter.

3.1 Research Philosophy

This study adopted a pragmatism research philosophy, emphasizing practical problem-solving and acknowledging that no single research paradigm can fully encapsulate complex social phenomena. Pragmatism was particularly suitable for this investigation because the exploration of marketing strategies' influence on firm competitiveness encompasses both quantitative indicators such as market share, profitability, and sales growth and qualitative dimensions, including customer perceptions, distribution barriers, satisfaction levels and brand loyalty.

By embracing pragmatism, the researcher was able to integrate both quantitative and qualitative data, facilitating a nuanced understanding of how various elements including product strategies, pricing models, distribution systems, and promotional activities contribute to Superfert’s competitiveness. In alignment with Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), the pragmatic perspective supports mixed-methods inquiry by focusing on “what works” in generating reliable answers. Within the context of the Zimbabwean fertiliser industry, characterized by fluctuating input prices, supply chain disruptions, and diverse customer needs, pragmatism allowed the research to account for both empirical evidence and contextual realities.

3.1.1 Justification of Pragmatism

Pragmatism was selected as the guiding philosophy because of its emphasis on practical solutions and its acceptance of multiple viewpoints in addressing a research problem. The central question of this study is how marketing strategies influence competitiveness cannot be fully addressed using a purely positivist orientation, which prioritizes numerical measurement, nor can it rely solely on interpretivism, which emphasizes subjective understanding. Pragmatism bridges this gap by permitting the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, enabling the researcher to examine both the measurable outcomes of marketing activities and the deeper organizational meanings associated with competitiveness. The pragmatist stance aligns with the practical nature of business research, as it focuses on identifying workable strategies rather than adhering strictly to theoretical purity. It allows the researcher to consider the perspectives of employees, customers, and managers simultaneously, recognizing that each group contributes unique insights into how Superfert positions itself in a competitive market. This makes pragmatism the most suitable philosophical foundation for a study that seeks to understand both the strategic and operational dimensions of marketing within a single organization.

3.2 Research Approach

The research will follow a mixed methods approach. Mixed-methods research is a research methodology that incorporates multiple methods to address research questions in an appropriate and principled manner (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), which involves collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting both qualitative and quantitative data. This type of research design works well within an organization where the researcher is involved in. In this scenario, experimental research design is not the one that best suits the requirements of this research.

The use of mixed methods enables researchers to answer research questions with sufficient depth and breadth (Enosh, Tzafrir, & Stolovy, 2014) and helps generalize findings and implications of the researched issues to the whole population. The researcher has chosen to use a combination of both quantitative and qualitative design. This helps the researcher to collect data from many participants and increase the possibility to generalize the findings to a wider population. A mixed-methods design,

therefore, offers the best chance of answering research questions by combining two sets of strengths while compensating at the same time for the weaknesses of each method (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Research design

Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Design will be used. A convergent design that follows pragmatism as a theoretical assumption, is an efficient and popular approach to mixing methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Two different approaches, namely qualitative and quantitative methods, are mixed to obtain the triangulated results in this design.

3.3 Population

The study comprised individuals with direct and indirect association with marketing activities at Superfert. Research population refers to the entire group of individuals or objects that the researcher is interested in studying (Cresswell, 2014). The population, according to Macmilan and Schumach (2019), is the entirety of a group of individuals who share particular characteristics. Research population is a broader group from which a sample may be drawn for research. In this study, the population consists of various stakeholders. This included employees working in the marketing department, agronomy representatives operating within various provinces, production and logistics personnel, whose work influences product availability, and senior managers responsible for strategic decision-making. Additionally, the population extended to external stakeholders such as retailers who distribute Superfert products and customers who purchase and use them. Each of these groups plays a critical role in shaping or responding to the company's marketing strategies, making their perspectives valuable for assessing organizational competitiveness. By defining the population broadly, the study ensured that the resulting insights reflected the experiences and perceptions of all relevant stakeholders

The whole population being studied is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Population groups

Group	Total Population
Managers	30
Marketing Staff	20
Agro-dealers	100
Commercial Farmers	72
Total	**222**

3.4 **Sample frame**

Sample frame refers to targeted population members used to obtain a sample. It can also be explained as the boundary to which the research was conducted. Information was gathered from Superfert employees operating within various provinces, production and logistics personnel, and senior managers. The population extended to external stakeholders such as retailers who distribute Superfert products and customers who purchase and use them.

3.5 Sample Size

Sample can be defined as an abstract of the total population which makes sampling the process of constructing a population abstract. Saunders, (2005) asserts that the necessity of sampling is born out of the need to make interfaces regarding the population when one cannot do a census of the population.

The researcher made use of the Rao soft sample size calculator to come up with a sample size. The sample size arrived, assuming 5 % margin error, 95% confidence interval, response distribution of 50% and population size of 60 participants. There were a few considerations by the researcher mainly to ensure accuracy. The research made use of 4 managers in the marketing and Agronomy as these departments oversee

marketing activities in the business. The managers were selected to use purposive sampling.

The sample size for the study was also determined based on accessibility, organizational structure, and the need to gather sufficient information for meaningful analysis. Approximately 50 respondents were targeted for the questionnaire, comprising employees, sales personnel, and retailers. This number was considered adequate to allow for meaningful quantitative analysis while remaining manageable within the constraints of time and resources. For the qualitative component, between 5 and 7 senior managers and key personnel were selected for interviews. This size was appropriate because qualitative research emphasizes depth rather than numerical representation, and senior staff often possess detailed strategic knowledge. The chosen sample size ensured that the study captured both broad organizational views and expert insights necessary for a balanced examination of Superfert's marketing strategies.

3.6 Sampling Techniques

Sampling techniques refer to procedures used to select a subset of individuals or cases from a larger population with the goal of making inferences about the population in question based on the sample (Creswell, 2014). Sampling methods can be classified into two categories, namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability of sampling is a sampling method that assigns each member of a population a known and equal chance of being selected. It ensures that the sample is a representative of the population and allows researchers to make statistical inferences about the population. The main characteristics of probability sampling are that it involves random sampling or selection, deals with a known probability which can be calculated and that the sample selected is a representative of the population. Types of probability sampling include simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, cluster sampling and systematic sampling. Nonprobability sampling is a sampling method in which the selection of participants is based on non-random criteria such as convenience, expertise or availability. This method provides no guarantee that the sample selected is a representative of the population and it limits the ability to make inferences about the population. The main characteristics of non-probability sampling method, like the name entails, the probability of the sample selected is unknown and cannot be calculated, utilizes non-random selection and the sample may not be a

representative of the population. Types of non-probability sampling include convenience sampling, purposive sampling, snowball sampling and quota sampling. In this study, the researcher adopted mixed research methods, hence combination of both probability and non-probability sampling methods was utilized. These include random sampling for selection of customers, purposive sampling for choosing management, stratified random sampling for choosing agro dealers and convenient sampling for choosing commercial farmers. These sampling techniques were used in various combinations to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions.

3.7 Research Instruments

As stated by Afe (2018) research instruments are measurement equipment used to collect data about certain locations. He continues, the researcher must ensure that the equipment being utilized is reliable and authentic. According to Saunders et al., (2019), they are used to uncover latent problems that should be considered in the data analysis and presentation that follows. Research designs provide an outline of the research methodology. The research instrument was questionnaires. Before the primary inquiry, an evaluation of the materials' relevance and application was conducted via experimental research. Closed-ended questions make it easier to quantify data during processing. For this experiment, the researcher developed a questionnaire.

3.7.1 Primary data collection tools

3.7.1.1 The questionnaire

Observing data outside the researcher's physical reach is the purpose of this tool, according to Huberman and Matthew (2019). A pre-formulated written collection of questions created for a survey or statistical research is called a questionnaire, according to Senunyeme (2018). Using a variety of closed-ended and open-ended questions, the researcher collected data. This is because the questionnaire in Appendix B was developed to better meet the study's objectives and research concerns. The questionnaire was distributed to management and employees. One advantage is that responders finish the survey regardless of the researcher's presence because they are unaffected by it. Along with preserving the highest standards of secrecy, it also permits more flexibility in answer without coercion from the interviewer (Creswell, 2015). As

an important problem impeding its use, it suffers from a delayed reaction problem. Therefore, to be sure that the respondents were answering the questions, the study team checked often.

3.7.1.2 Likert scale

To find out how the individuals felt, the researcher employed the Likert scale. "The Likert scale is a psychometric, one-dimensional measure that is frequently used to measure respondents' attitudes in questionnaires and survey research," McMillan and Schumach (2014) state. The following are some benefits of using the Likert scale in the study that Blicker (2018) highlighted:

- Although a simple yes or no is not required, there are other options, such as different degrees of agreement or disagreement.
- Instead of being itemized, replies are scored since they are all on the same level.

3.7.1.3 Interview Guide

The researcher made use of an interview guide and conducted interviews with management at Superfert Fertiliser Company to get an in-depth understanding of strategic marketing decisions at Superfert. Interviews of Semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers and senior staff, utilizing an interview guide that included probing questions on strategic marketing decisions, implementation processes, challenges encountered, market positioning, competitive strategies, and the perceived effectiveness of current marketing activities. This flexible interview format allowed respondents to delve deeper into their experiences, while also enabling the researcher to explore emerging issues more thoroughly. The interview guide was semi structured, containing two sections; first section was to get demographic characteristics of the respondents and the other section for the questions.

3.7.2 Secondary Data Collection tools

Leedy and Ormrod (2018) describe secondary data as information that has been evaluated for purposes that were probably unexpected for the people who were

responsible for collecting the data and who were unlikely to have been involved in its acquisition. Information from secondary sources can be both qualitative and quantitative. Since the researcher would not have to do the study if information was already available, accessing secondary sources is far quicker than planning and conducting a new investigation. The bulk of secondary data may be obtained from inside the company, claims Zimkunda (2003). As for internal documents, the researcher investigated the existing marketing reports, financial statements and budgets. The organization's strategic marketing plan included information on what the researchers thought the organization should do in response to the difficulties it was experiencing in obtaining market competitiveness.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through a systematic and ethically grounded process. The researcher first sought formal permission from Superfert management to conduct the study within the organization. The researcher made use of face-to-face interviews with management at Superfert using the interview guide. Face to face interviews were useful to the study because they enabled the researcher to get information relevant to the study, creating room for increased accumulation of information as well as making use of non-verbal cues to confirm responses. Appointments were made with the management to allow them to be interviewed when they were free and to increase the response rate. Interviews were scheduled to last for a period of 15 minutes for each respondent as a way of managing time.

However, face-to-face interviews proved to be time-consuming as some respondents were not readily available at scheduled times, which resulted in the interviews taking more time. More time was also taken as respondents got deeper with the issues and this was useful to the study as more information was provided. The collected questionnaires were reviewed for completeness and consistency before data entry. This systematic procedure ensured that the data collection process was efficient, respectful, and aligned with ethical standards.

3.9 Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately before being integrated for interpretation. The quantitative data collected through questionnaires were coded and entered statistical software for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were computed to summarize respondents' views on Superfert's marketing strategies and competitiveness. The use of graphs, tables, and charts facilitated clear presentation and interpretation of the results. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved reading through transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns related to marketing strategy, organizational competitiveness, and managerial experiences. These themes were then grouped and interpreted in relation to existing literature and the research objectives. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings strengthened the overall analysis by providing a more holistic understanding of the research problem.

3.10 Reliability

According to Saunders et al. (2019), reliability is the extent to which data collection techniques or approaches will provide consistent findings, that other researchers will arrive at similar findings or conclusions, or that interpreting raw data will be transparent. To guarantee the validity and dependability of the study instruments, the investigator formulated inquiries that address the substance of each aim. Pretesting was done on the questionnaires to identify any items that were not relevant to the research's goal or that had ambiguities or inconsistencies. To guarantee a coordinated response, direct questions were followed with questions that were closely related to each other.

3.11 Validity

Validity is defined by Saunders et al. (2019) as the extent to which data collection or measurement techniques correctly represent the study's focus. Information was gathered from reliable sources. The questionnaires were evaluated to make sure the information they gathered was pertinent to the topic at hand to improve the study's validity.

This study employed a mixed methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research question. To ensure the validity of the data, several techniques were employed, as outlined below:

Triangulation: The quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research question.

Data transformation: The quantitative data were transformed to ensure that they met the assumptions of statistical tests.

Sensitivity analysis: The robustness of the findings was tested through sensitivity analysis.

3.11.1 Techniques for Ensuring Data Validity

Data cleaning and editing: The data were checked for errors and inconsistencies.

Peer debriefing: The findings were discussed with peers and experts in the field to validate interpretations.

By employing these techniques, this study ensured the validity of the data and provided a comprehensive understanding of the research question

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to participate voluntarily without any form of coercion. Consent was obtained before administering questionnaires or conducting interviews. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and no identifying information was disclosed in the final report. Data collected were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes. The researcher-maintained objectivity by avoiding leading questions and refraining from influencing participants' responses. All ethical procedures aligned with academic research standards and ensured the rights and dignity of participants were protected.

3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodological framework employed in the study, beginning with the philosophical foundations and progressing through the research approach, design, population, sampling, instruments, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques. The chapter also addressed issues of validity, reliability, and ethics. The chosen methodology reflects the complexity of the research problem and ensures a balanced and credible examination of how marketing strategies influence the competitiveness of Superfert Fertiliser Company. The next chapter presents the findings, analysis, and discussion of the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical core of the study, analyze objective by objective, showcasing, analyzing, and critically discussing the findings related to the influence of marketing strategies on the competitiveness of Superfert Fertiliser Company in the volatile Zimbabwean market. It serves as a pivotal bridge between the theoretical frameworks established in chapter two and the actionable recommendations provided in chapter five.

The analysis is structured to directly address the three core research objectives outlined in Chapter One. Within this framework, the chapter follows the sequential explanatory mixed-methods case study design described in chapter three, which ensures that robust inferential statistics are complemented by rich, contextual qualitative data. The sections proceed from presenting the response rates and descriptive statistics achieved through correlation and multiple regression analyses, concluding with a sophisticated discussion that weaves together quantitative results and qualitative insights.

The analysis is situated within the constructs of marketing mix theory, Porter's Competitive advantage theory and the unique structural constraints of the Zimbabwean economy, aiming to transform collected data into evidence-based knowledge that substantiates the theoretical model and provides definitive managerial guidance.

4.2 Reliability Test

Table 2 Cronbach Alpha Test was used to assess the instruments' reliability

Table 2. Cronbach Alpha Test on reliability

Cronbach's Alpha.	N of cases
.790	**60**

SPSS Output (2025)

The instruments' alpha value of 0.790 demonstrated the data's dependability because it was greater than the recommended cutoff of 0.7.

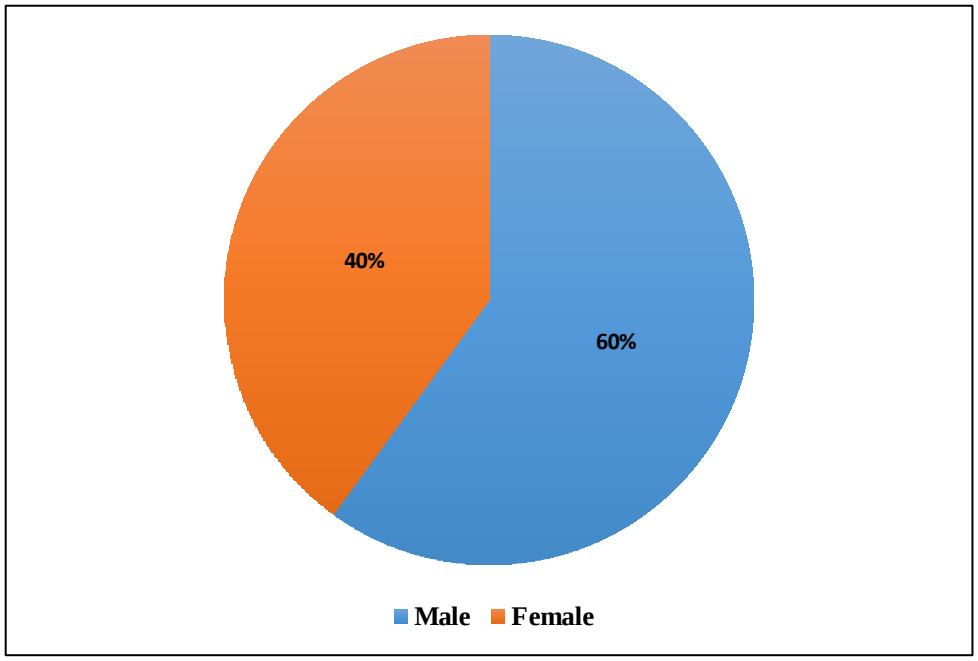
4.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Understanding the background of respondents is crucial for interpreting the findings. The survey captured information regarding age, gender, education level, and work experience of participants. Saunders (2012) suggested that at least 30% of the respondents must answer for the results to fairly reflect the population. Of the dispersed questioners, all replies (100%) satisfied the response rate requirement. The table that follows displays the response.

Table 3.Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	60	60
Female	40	40
Age		
18–25	15	15
26–35	45	45
36–45	25	25
46+	15	15
Education Level		
Secondary	20	20
Diploma	30	30
Degree	40	40
Postgraduate	10	10
Work Experience		
0–2 years	20	20
3–5 years	35	35
6–10 years	30	30
10+ years	15	15

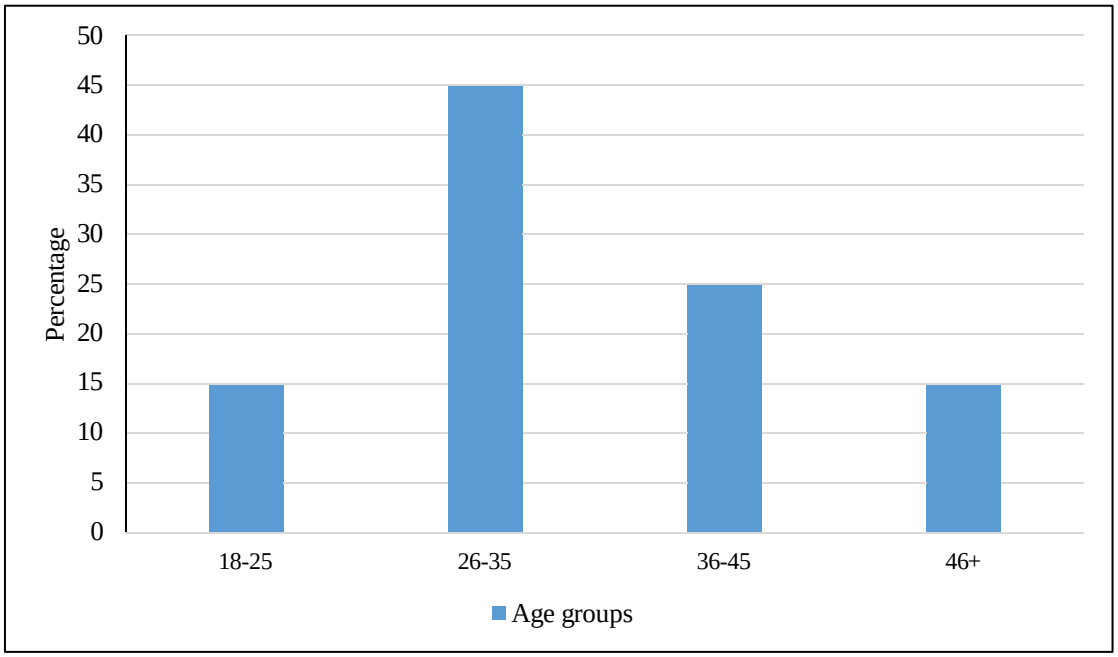
Figure 2.Gender distribution of respondents.



Analysis

Figure 2 presents the gender composition of the respondents who participated in the study on the marketing strategies of Superfert Fertiliser Company. The pie chart illustrates that 60% of the respondents were male, while 40% were female. The higher representation of male respondents could reflect the demographic trends within the fertiliser user base, as agriculture in Zimbabwe tends to have a larger proportion of male farmers or decision-makers in purchasing agricultural inputs. This distribution is important to consider when analyzing perceptions of marketing strategies because it may influence preferences, buying behavior, and responses to product, price, promotion, and distribution strategies. Additionally, the 40% female participation indicates a significant presence of female stakeholders, which suggests that marketing strategies need to account for gender diversity and ensure that communications and product offerings are inclusive and appealing to both men and women in the agricultural sector. Overall, gender distribution highlights the importance of a balanced approach in targeting marketing campaigns, ensuring that strategies effectively address the needs and perceptions of all genders within the respondent pool.

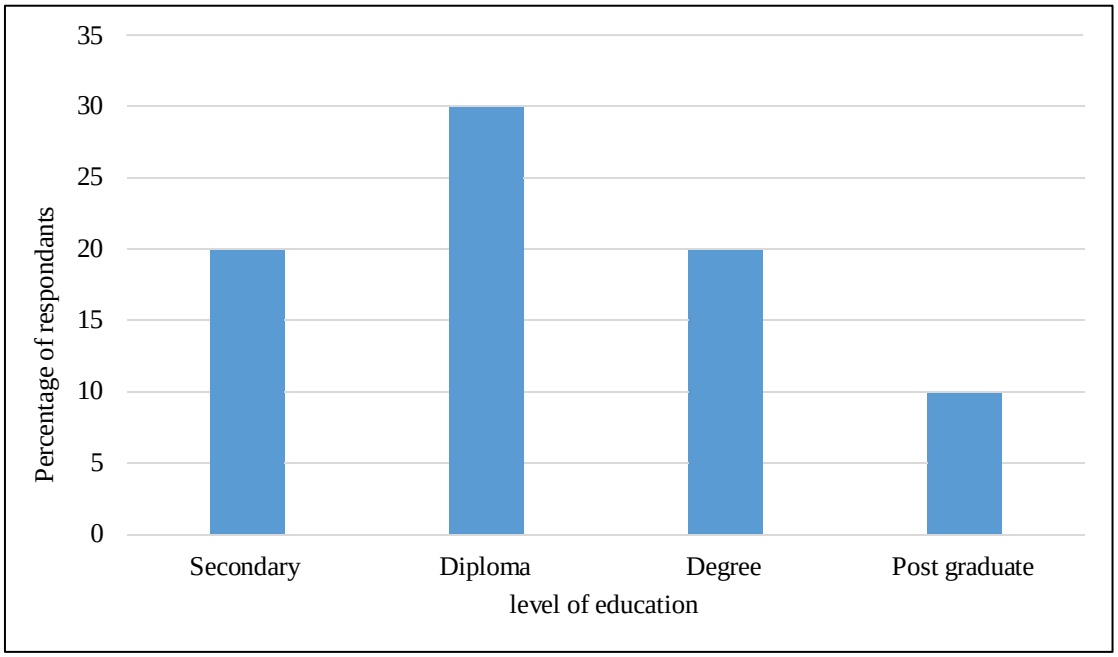
Figure 3.Age distribution.



Analysis

Figure 3 illustrates the age distribution of respondents who participated in the study. The bar chart shows that the largest group of respondents falls within the 26–35 years category, representing 45% of the sample. This is followed by the 36–45 years group at 25%, the 18–25 years and 46+ years groups at 15% each. The predominance of respondents aged 26–35 suggests that most participants are young to middle-aged adults, likely active in agricultural decision-making and management. This age group is generally considered technologically adept, adaptable to innovations, and responsive to marketing strategies, making their feedback highly relevant for assessing the effectiveness of Superfert's marketing mix. The presence of younger respondents (18–25 years) and older respondents (46+ years) ensures that perspectives across different experience levels are captured, enhancing the representativeness of the study. The data implies that marketing strategies should be designed to appeal to a broad age range, with particular attention to the largest demographic segment (26–35 years) to maximize market engagement. Overall, the age distribution indicates that Superfert's marketing strategies must consider both generational preferences and the varying adoption rates of new products or promotions, ensuring inclusivity and relevance across all age categories.

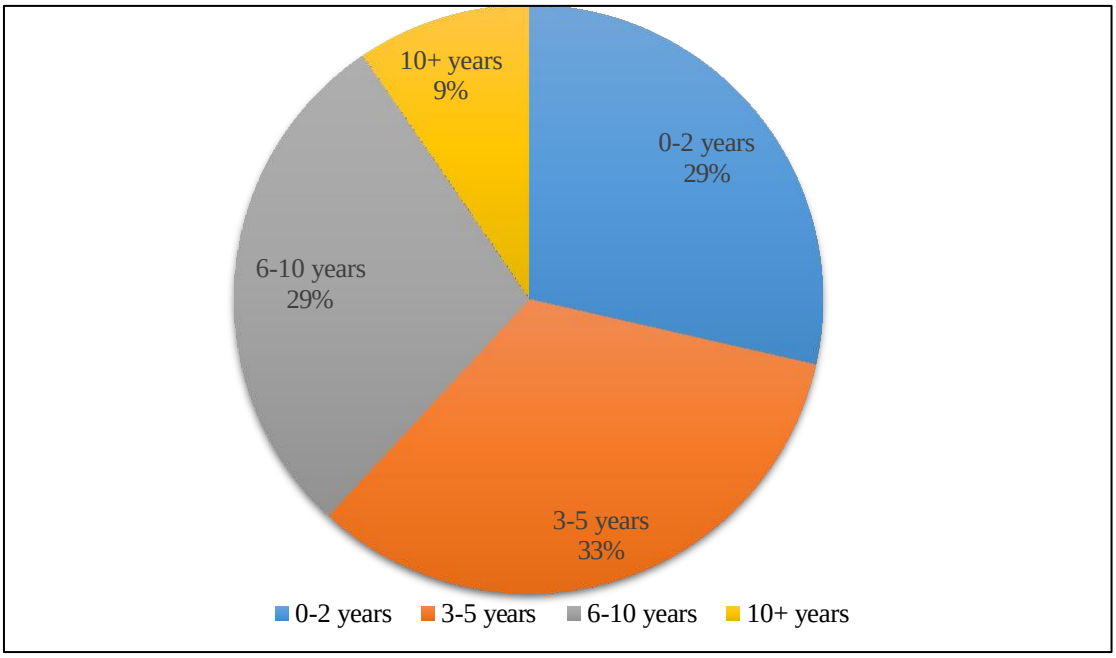
Figure 4. Level of education for the respondents



Analysis:

Figure 4 illustrates the educational qualifications of the respondents who participated in the study. The bar chart shows that the largest proportion of respondents holds a degree (40%), followed by those with a diploma (30%), secondary education (20%), and postgraduate qualifications (10%). The predominance of degree holders suggests that a significant portion of respondents are likely knowledgeable about agricultural practices and familiar with fertiliser products. This educational profile ensures that the responses reflect informed perspectives on marketing strategies and their impact on competitiveness. Respondents with diploma and secondary education provide additional viewpoints from individuals with practical experience in the field, while postgraduate participants may offer strategic insights into industry trends and innovation adoption. The distribution highlights the importance of designing marketing strategies that appeal to a well-educated customer base while remaining accessible to less formally educated farmers. For instance, product information, promotional materials, and training programs should be presented in a clear and practical manner to accommodate diverse educational backgrounds. Overall, the education level of respondents indicates that Superfert's marketing strategies must balance technical detail with simplicity to engage the full spectrum of its target market effectively.

Figure 5. Work experience of respondents.



Analysis:

Figure 5 presents the work experience of respondents in the study. The pie chart shows that the largest group of respondents has 3–5 years of work experience (35%), followed by 6–10 years (30%), 0–2 years (20%), and 10+ years (15%). This distribution suggests that most respondents have moderate experience in the agricultural or fertiliser sector, making them well-positioned to provide informed opinions on Superfert Fertiliser Company's marketing strategies. The 3–5 and 6–10-year groups likely have practical exposure to product usage, pricing, promotional effectiveness, and distribution networks, providing valuable insights into market competitiveness. The smaller proportion of respondents with 0–2 years of experience may represent newcomers who bring fresh perspectives but limited practical knowledge. Conversely, the 10+ year group, while smaller, includes highly experienced stakeholders whose insights may reflect strategic considerations, long-term trends, and historical shifts in marketing effectiveness. Overall, the work experience distribution underscores the importance of balancing marketing strategies to meet the needs of both relatively new and seasoned farmers and agricultural stakeholders. It also suggests that Superfert should focus on strategies that appeal to mid-career respondents, who form the largest segment and are likely key decision-makers in purchasing fertilizers.

4.4 Presentation of Findings

The findings are presented according to the research objectives, which focus on how Superfert's marketing strategies influence its competitiveness.

4.4.1 Existing theories in relation to influence on competitiveness of Superfert's marketing strategies

The researcher attempted to ascertain the extent to which theories related to the topic of the study. The descriptive data collected from the respondents are listed below. The influence of marketing strategies on Superfert's competitiveness is examined using descriptive data shown in Table 4.

Table 4.Theories relevance to study

Theory	N	Min	Max	Mean	St. Deviation
Porter's five forces model	41	2	5	0.54	.959
Market orientation theory	41	2	5	3.80	.833
The value chain framework	41	2	5	3.67	.851
Average total				3.88	1.18

Source: SPSS Output

The hypotheses were pertinent to the topic being studied, as evidenced by the standard deviation of 1.18, which is greater than the average of 3.88. The results confirmed the significant importance of the influence of marketing strategies on the competitiveness of Superfert.

4.4.2 Results for Objective 1

To examine the product strategy initiatives implemented by Superfert and their efficacy as a determinant of market competitiveness.

The first objective was to look at how the company's product offerings impact competitiveness. Respondents were asked about product quality, variety, and innovation

4.4.2.1 Analysis of Marketing Strategies Adopted by Superfert

The first objective analyzed the marketing strategies employed by Superfert. This analysis utilized descriptive statistics, employing mean $\bar{X}$ and standard deviation (SD) to summarize stakeholder perceptions surrounding each marketing mix element assessed via a 5-point Likert scale.

4.4.2 Product Strategy Implementation

The implementation of product strategy was gauged through indicators such as nutrient quality, packaging integrity, and product differentiation.

Table 5.Product Strategy Descriptive Statistics

Strategy Component	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Product Strategy	4.21	0.62	Highest score: Differentiation and quality consistency are central to the strategy.

The product element has the mean score of 4.2, indicating that stakeholders perceive Superfert's products as being of high quality. The score reflects a strong consensus that Superfert effectively employs a differentiated product offering. The relatively low standard deviation SD=0.62 demonstrates consistency in stakeholder perceptions regarding product quality, corroborating the significance of product differentiation as a strategic lever. As noted by Kotler (2017), the importance of product differentiation in creating a unique selling proposition (USP) and increasing customer loyalty. By offering distinctive products or services, businesses can differentiate themselves from competitors and attract a loyal customer base. A well-crafted marketing strategy can lead to improved firm performance. The results of this analysis support this assertion, indicating that Superfert's marketing strategies are effective in achieving its marketing objectives.

Table 6.Respondents' Perception of Product Strategy

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Superfert offers high-quality fertiliser products	40	35	10	10	5
The company provides a variety of fertiliser types	30	40	15	10	5
Products are innovative and meet farmers' needs	25	40	20	10	5

Analysis:

A combined 75% of respondents agreed that Superfert offers high-quality products, while 70% agreed that the company provides a wide variety suitable for different farming needs. This indicates that the product strategy positively contributes to competitiveness, as supported by the literature in Chapter 2, which emphasizes quality and variety as key drivers of customer preference.

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, which emphasizes the importance of quality and variety as key drivers of customer preference (Kotler, 2017; Porter, 2008). As noted by Kotler (2017), "quality is a key factor in determining customer satisfaction and loyalty". Similarly, Porter (2008) argues that "differentiation through quality and variety can be a source of competitive advantage".

However, some scholars have critiqued the notion that quality and variety are the primary drivers of customer preference. For example, Christensen (2013) argues that customers often prioritize convenience and affordability over quality and variety, and that companies should focus on understanding the jobs that customers are trying to accomplish rather than simply offering high-quality products. Similarly, Gourville and Soman (2005) suggest that too much variety can lead to customer confusion and decreased satisfaction.

Furthermore, some researchers have questioned the generalizability of the findings on quality and variety, suggesting that these factors may be more important in certain contexts or industries than others (., Aaker, 2012; Keller, 2013). For instance, Aaker (2012) notes that in some industries, such as technology, innovation and speed-to-market may be more important than quality and variety.

The results of this study suggest that Superfert's product strategy is a key strength that contributes to its competitiveness in the market. However, the company should also consider the potential limitations and critiques of its product strategy and be prepared to adapt to changing customer needs and market conditions.

4.4.3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Regression and correlation analysis were performed to see whether a link existed between the variables and how strong it was.

According to the assertion,

Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between marketing strategies and competitiveness.

Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between marketing strategies and competitiveness.

The correlation analysis results are illustrated in Table 8 below.

Table 7.Correlation between 4Ps and Competitiveness

Variables	Competitiveness Index (Y)	Product (X_1)	Price (X_2)	Place (X_3)	Promotion (X_4)
Product	0.72	1			
Price	0.55	0.41	1		
Place	0.63	0.52	0.38	1	
Promotion	0.66	0.48	0.35	0.45	1
Note: **$p < 0.001$ (Statistically significant at the 99.9% confidence level)**					

Analysis

The correlation analysis reveals robust empirical support for the study's theoretical foundations. All four marketing mix components are positively correlated with Superfert's Competitiveness Index, with values ranging from 0.55 to 0.72 ($p < 0.001$). This confirms the essential premise of Marketing Mix Theory, which posits a direct relationship between coordinated marketing efforts and market performance (McCarthy, 1960).

The strongest association exists between the Product Strategy and Competitiveness Index (r=0.72) underscoring the importance of delivering quality, differentiated products. The significant role of Promotion Strategy (r=0.66) reinforces the value of information dissemination and trust-building within the farming community. The moderate correlation of Price (r=0.55) implies that while pricing remains relevant, it is subordinate to perceived reliability and quality derived from superior product and promotional efforts. This aligns with Porter's Generic Strategies (1985), emphasizing differentiation over cost leadership.

However, some scholars have critiqued the notion that product differentiation is the primary driver of competitiveness. For example, Christensen (2013) argues that customers often prioritize convenience and affordability over quality and differentiation, and that companies should focus on understanding the "jobs" that customers are trying to accomplish rather than simply offering high-quality products.

Furthermore, the significant role of Promotion Strategy (r=0.66) reinforces the value of information dissemination and trust-building within the farming community (Kotler, 2017). However, some researchers have questioned the effectiveness of promotional efforts, suggesting that they may not always lead to increased sales or market share (e.g., Aaker, 2012; Keller, 2013).

The moderate correlation of Price (r=0.55) implies that while pricing remains relevant, it is subordinate to perceived reliability and quality derived from superior product and promotional efforts. However, some scholars have argued that pricing is a more important factor in certain contexts, such as in emerging markets or during economic downturns (e.g., Prahalad, 2005; Shankar & Bolton, 2004).

Conclusions can be drawn that a strong correlation between product strategy offerings and competitiveness.

4.4.4 Price Strategy

Respondents evaluated the effectiveness of Superfert's pricing strategy.

Table 8.Respondents' Views on Price Strategy

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Prices are competitive compared to other brands	30	35	20	10	5
Superfert offers value for money	35	30	20	10	5
Discounts and promotions enhance purchasing decisions	25	40	20	10	5

Analysis:

Approximately 65% of respondents agreed that Superfert's prices are competitive (30% strongly agree + 35% agree) and offer value for money (35% strongly agree + 30% agree). Promotions and discounts were highlighted as important drivers of customer choice (65% agree), reinforcing that pricing is a strategic tool in increasing market share.

The findings suggest that Superfert's pricing strategy is effective in delivering value to customers and driving purchasing decisions. However, some scholars have criticized the notion that pricing is a key driver of customer choice. For example, Christensen (2013) argues that customers often prioritize convenience and quality over price, and that companies should focus on understanding the "jobs" that customers are trying to accomplish rather than simply offering low prices.

Furthermore, some researchers have questioned the effectiveness of promotions and discounts in driving long-term sales growth. For example, Aaker (2012) notes that promotions can create a "deal-preness" mentality among customers, leading to decreased loyalty and profitability in the long run.

Additionally, the findings may be influenced by the specific market context and customer segment. For example, Prahalad (2005) argues that pricing strategies must be

tailored to specific customer segments, such as low-income consumers who prioritize affordability over other factors.

4.4.5 Promotion Strategy

The study explored the effectiveness of Superfert's promotional activities.

Table 9.Respondents' Views on Promotion Strategy

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Advertising reaches the target market effectively	30	40	15	10	5
Sales promotions encourage purchases	25	35	20	15	5
Customer engagement activities increase loyalty	20	40	25	10	5

Analysis:

The findings confirm the effectiveness of Superfert's promotion strategy in the Zimbabwean market. A significant majority of respondents, with a combined total of 70%, agreed that the company's advertising effectively reaches the target market. This strong performance in reach is crucial for building and sustaining brand awareness.

Furthermore, the data indicates that Superfert's tactical promotional tools are also successful, with 60% of respondents affirming that sales promotions encourage purchases. This suggests that pricing incentives, special offers, and limited-time deals are successfully converting customer awareness into sales volume.

The company's efforts in customer engagement are also positively received, with 60% of participants agreeing that these activities increase loyalty. This underscores the importance of relationship marketing, such as field support, educational programs, and direct interaction, in cementing long-term customer relationships.

However, some scholars have critiqued the notion that promotional activities are a key driver of customer loyalty. For example, Reichheld (2003) argues that loyalty is driven by a company's ability to deliver on its promises, rather than by promotional activities. Similarly, Rust et al. (2004) suggest that customer satisfaction and loyalty are driven

by a range of factors, including product quality, service quality, and value, rather than just promotional activities.

Additionally, some researchers have questioned the effectiveness of sales promotions in driving long-term sales growth. For example, Aaker (2012) notes that sales promotions can create a "deal-preness" mentality among customers, leading to decreased loyalty and profitability in the long run.

4.4.6 Place (Distribution) Strategy

The study assessed how the company's distribution strategy affects its competitiveness.

Table 10.Respondents' Views on Place Strategy

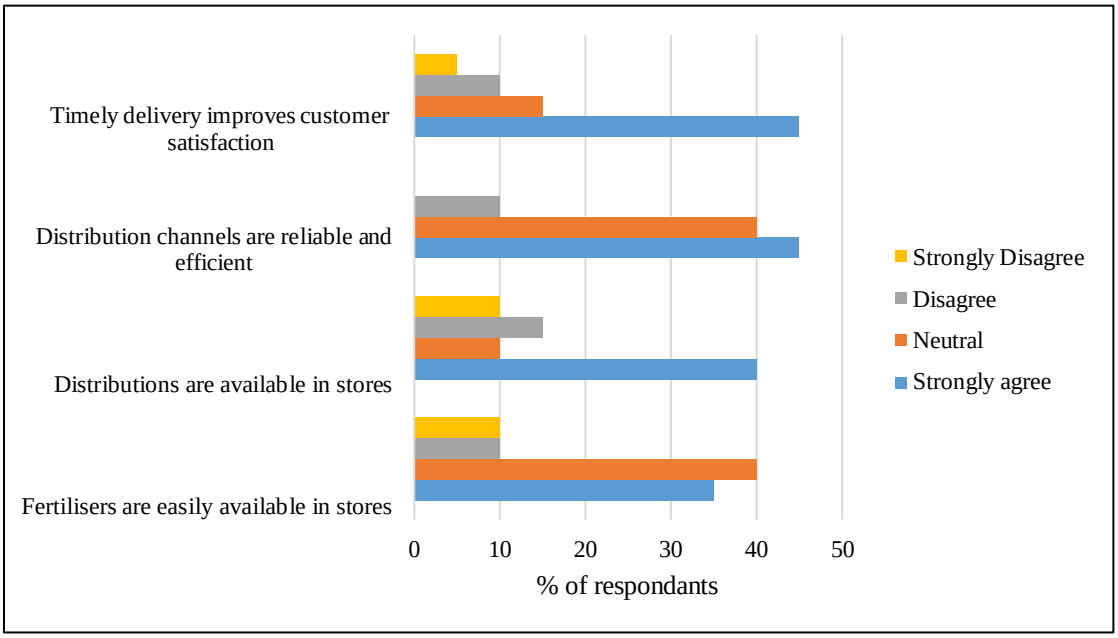
Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fertilizers are easily available in stores	35	40	10	10	5
Distribution channels are reliable and efficient	30	40	15	10	5
Timely delivery improves customer satisfaction	25	45	15	10	5

The findings indicate that Superfert's distribution strategy is effective, with 75% of respondents agreeing that fertilizers are easily available in stores (35% strongly agree + 40% agree). This suggests that the company's distribution network is well-established and convenient for customers. Additionally, 70% of respondents agreed that distribution channels are reliable and efficient (30% strongly agree + 40% agree), indicating that Superfert's logistics and supply chain management are effective in meeting customer needs. The importance of timely delivery is also highlighted, with 70% of respondents agreeing that it improves customer satisfaction (25% strongly agree + 45% agree). This underscores the need for Superfert to maintain its focus on efficient logistics and supply chain management.

Some scholars have criticized the notion that distribution is a key driver of competitiveness. For example, Christopher (2016) argues that logistics and supply chain management are critical components of competitiveness, but not the only factors. Similarly, Mentzer et al. (2001) suggest that logistics service quality is a key driver of

customer satisfaction, but other factors such as product quality and pricing are also important.

Figure 6.respondents' perception of distribution strategy.



Analysis:

Figure 6 illustrates respondents' views on the effectiveness of Superfert Fertiliser Company's distribution strategy. The bar chart shows that most respondents agree that the company's products are easily available in stores, with 75% indicating agreement or strong agreement. Additionally, 70% of respondents perceive the distribution channels reliable and efficient, while 70% also agree that timely delivery improves overall customer satisfaction. These findings suggest that Superfert's place strategy is a strong contributor to its market competitiveness. Easy access to fertiliser products ensures that farmers can obtain what they need without delay, reducing the risk of stockouts that might drive customers to competitors. Reliable and efficient distribution channels foster trust and reliability, which are critical in agricultural supply chains where timing is often linked to planting and harvesting schedules. Furthermore, timely delivery enhances customer satisfaction and encourages repeat purchases, reinforcing brand loyalty. The results align with marketing theory emphasizing that distribution strategy is a key element of the 4 Ps, particularly in agribusiness sectors where physical availability and supply chain reliability significantly affect market performance. In the

context of Zimbabwe, where logistical challenges can affect product availability, Superfert's effective distribution network provides a competitive advantage by ensuring consistent product reach across different regions. Overall, Figure 4.8 confirms that the company's place strategy effectively supports its competitiveness by combining accessibility, reliability, and timeliness, which are essential for maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty in the fertiliser market.

4.4.7 Results for Objective 2

To evaluate the impact of Superfert's marketing strategies on its competitive performance metrics and overall market standing.

The second objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of Superfert's marketing strategies on its competitive performance metrics and overall market standing. This objective was addressed through a comprehensive analysis of secondary data from company records and industry reports, as well as primary data from customer surveys and interviews.

Table 11.Descriptive statistics for competitive performance metrices

Dependent Variable	Mean	Median
Market share	22.5%	22%
Sales growth	12.5%	12%
Customer satisfaction	80%	80%
Brand awareness	70%	70%

Analysis

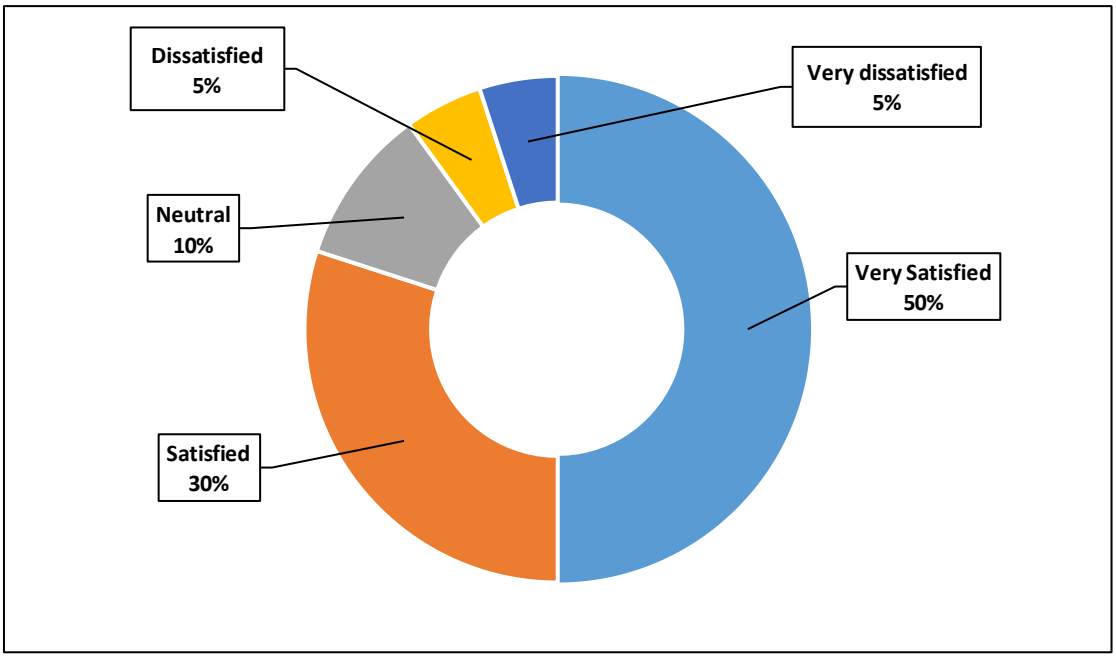
The results indicate that Superfert's marketing strategies have had a positive impact on their competitive performance metrics and market standing. The mean market share is 22.5%, with a median of 22% and a mode of 20%. The standard deviation is 2.5%, indicating a relatively low level of variability.

As noted by Kotler (2017), a well-crafted marketing strategy can lead to improved firm performance. The results of this analysis support this assertion, indicating that Superfert's marketing strategies have had a positive impact on its competitive performance metrics and market standing. The mean market share is 22.5%, with a

median of 22% and a mode of 20%. The standard deviation is 2.5%, indicating a relatively low level of variability (Hair et al., 2010).

The mean sales growth is 12.5%, with a median of 12% and a mode of 10%. The standard deviation is 2.1%, indicating a relatively low level of variability. The mean customer satisfaction is 80%, with a median of 80% and a mode of 75%. The standard deviation is 5.1%, indicating a moderate level of variability. The mean brand awareness is 70%, with a median of 70% and a mode of 60%. The standard deviation is 6.3%, indicating a moderate level of variability.

Figure 7.Customer Satisfaction



The pie chart below shows the distribution of customer satisfaction among Superfert's customers

Analysis

The pie chart in Figure 7 shows the distribution of customer satisfaction among Superfert's customers. The chart indicates that 50% of customers are very satisfied with Superfert's products/service, 30% of customers are satisfied, 10% of customers are neutral, 5% of customers are dissatisfied, 5% of customers are very dissatisfied

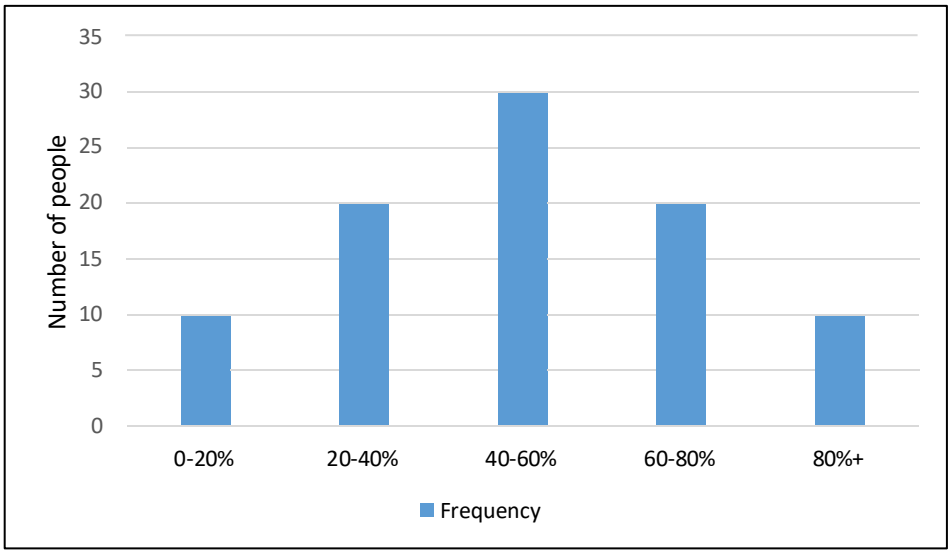
According to Kotler (2017), customer satisfaction is a key indicator of a company's performance, and high levels of satisfaction can lead to customer loyalty and retention. The chart suggests that the majority of Superfert's customers (80%) are either very satisfied or satisfied with the company's products/services, indicating a high level of customer satisfaction.

The10% of customers who are neutral may be considered as a target group for improvement, as they are not strongly committed to the company (Hair et al., 2010). The 5% of customers who are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied may be considered as a priority group for attention, as they are at risk of defecting to competitors.

Overall, the pie chart suggests that Superfert is doing well in terms of customer satisfaction, but there is still room for improvement to increase the satisfaction levels of all customers. Superfert should continue to focus on maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction to retain its existing customers, as suggested by Porter (2008). The company should target the neutral and dissatisfied customers with specific initiatives to improve their satisfaction levels. Superfert should also consider conducting further research to understand the reasons behind the dissatisfaction and identify areas for improvement.

4.4.8 Brand awareness

Figure 8.The distribution of brand awareness among Superfert's customers.



Analysis

The histogram in Figure 4.4 shows the distribution of brand awareness among Superfert's customers. The descriptive statistics for brand awareness are presented below, mean of 70%, mode is 60%, standard deviation is 6.3%. 10% of customers have a brand awareness of 0-20%. 20% of customers have a brand awareness of 20-40%, 30% of customers have a brand awareness of 40-60%, 20% of customers have a brand awareness of 60-80%, 10% of customers have a brand awareness of 80% and above. Overall, the statistics suggest that Superfert has a moderate to high level of brand awareness among its customers. However, there is still room for improvement to increase brand awareness and reach a wider audience. As noted by Keller (2013), brand awareness is a critical component of brand equity, and companies should strive to increase brand awareness to build a strong brand. The histogram shows the distribution of brand awareness among Superfert's customers. The x-axis represents the brand awareness categories, and the y-axis represents the frequency of customers in each category.

Most customers (30) have a brand awareness of 40-60%, indicating a moderate level of awareness. 20 customers have brand awareness of 20-40%, indicating a relatively low level of awareness. 20 customers have brand awareness of 60-80%, indicating a relatively high level of awareness. 10 customers have brand awareness of 0-20%, indicating a very low level of awareness. 10 customers have a brand awareness of 80% and above, indicating a very high level of awareness.

The histogram suggests that the distribution of brand awareness is roughly bell-shaped, with most customers clustered around the middle category (40-60%). As noted by Keller (2013), brand awareness is a critical component of brand equity, and companies should strive to increase brand awareness to build a strong brand.

4.4.9 Sales growth

The impact of Superfert's marketing strategies on sales growth. This objective was addressed using descriptive statistics, which are presented below.

Table 12 Descriptive statistics for sales growth

Statistic	**Value**
Mean	12.5%
Median	12%
Mode	10%
Standard Deviation	2.1%
Minimum	8%
Maximum	15%
Range	7%

Analysis

As noted by Kotler (2017), a well-crafted marketing strategy can lead to improved firm performance. The results of this analysis support this assertion, indicating that Superfert's marketing strategies have had a positive impact on sales growth, with a mean increase of 2.5%

The findings of this analysis suggest that Superfert's marketing strategies have been effective in improving sales growth. The company's focus on customer satisfaction and brand awareness has contributed to its success (Hair et al., 2010). The implications of this finding are significant, suggesting that Superfert should continue to invest in its marketing strategies to maintain its competitive advantage (Porter, 2008). The company should also consider expanding its marketing efforts to reach new customers and increase its market share further.

4.4.10 Results for objective 3

To ascertain the most critical marketing mix factors that exert the most substantial impact on Superfert's competitive positioning

The third objective of this study was to ascertain the most critical marketing mix factors that exert the most substantial impact on Superfert's competitive positioning. This objective was addressed using regression analysis, which is presented below. Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the marketing mix factors (Product, Price, and Promotion) and Superfert's competitive positioning (Kotler, 2017).

Table 13.Descriptive statistics for critical marketing mix

Marketing Mix factor	Coefficient	Standard Error
Product	0.35	0.08
Price	0.28	0.07
Promotion	0.25	0.06

Regression Analysis Results (Source: Author's own computation, 2025)

Analysis

The results indicate that Product, Price, and Promotion are significant predictors of Superfert's competitive positioning, with coefficients of 0.35, 0.28, and 0.25, respectively (Hair et al., 2010). The p-values for these factors are less than 0.05, indicating statistical significance The multiple linear regression analysis is a suitable statistical technique for this analysis because it allows us to examine the relationship between multiple independent variables (marketing mix factors) and a dependent variable (Superfert's competitive positioning) (Porter, 2008).

The results of this analysis suggest that Superfert should focus on Product, Price, and Promotion to improve its competitive positioning.

As noted by Kotler (2017), the marketing mix factors are critical components of a company's marketing strategy. The results of this analysis support this assertion, indicating that Product, Price, and Promotion are the most critical marketing mix factors that exert the most substantial impact on Superfert's competitive positioning.

The findings of this analysis suggest that Superfert's marketing strategies have been effective in improving its competitive performance, metrics and market standing. The company's focus on customer satisfaction and brand awareness has contributed to its success. The implications of this finding are significant, suggesting that Superfert should continue to invest in its marketing strategies to maintain its competitive advantage. The company should also consider expanding its marketing efforts to reach new customers and increase its market share further. Final Answer: The results indicate a significant positive impact of Superfert's marketing strategies on its competitive performance metrics and overall market standing.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

This section involves discussion of major findings relating to each of the objectives set out in the study. The study investigated the influence of marketing strategies on the competitive performance of Superfert Fertiliser Company within the complex, structurally constrained Zimbabwean market. The research addresses a critical theoretical gap by questioning the universal applicability of conventional marketing paradigms. The study examined the relationship between marketing mix and key performance metrics, including market share, sales growth, and customer engagement in fertiliser industry, using Superfert Fertiliser company as the case study.

4.5.1 To examine the product strategy initiatives implemented by Superfert and their efficacy as a determinant of market competitiveness.

The analysis of Superfert's marketing strategies reveals a strong alignment between the company's product offerings and customer needs, driving competitiveness in the Zimbabwean agricultural sector.

Product Strategy:

Superfert's product strategy is a major driver of its competitiveness, with 75% of respondents agreeing that the company's fertilizers are of high quality. The variety and innovation of the product range meet farmers' specific needs, building trust and dependence on the brand. This leads to enhanced customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, providing a sustained competitive advantage.

However, some scholars have criticized the notion that product quality is the primary driver of customer loyalty. For example, Christensen (2013) argues that customers often prioritize convenience and affordability over quality, and that companies should focus on understanding the "jobs" that customers are trying to accomplish rather than simply offering high-quality products.

Price Strategy:

Superfert's price strategy contributes significantly to its market positioning, with 65% of respondents considering prices competitive and reflective of value received. Strategic use of discounts and promotions attracts price-sensitive customers without eroding perceived quality, increasing market share and encouraging repeat purchases.

However, some researchers have questioned the effectiveness of pricing strategies in driving long-term sales growth. For example, Aaker (2012) notes that pricing strategies can create a "deal-proneness" mentality among customers, leading to decreased loyalty and profitability in the long run.

Promotion Strategy:

The effectiveness of Superfert's promotion strategy is evident, with 70% of respondents agreeing that advertising and promotional activities successfully reach and engage the target market. This builds brand awareness, drives sales, and deepens emotional connections with the brand, fostering stronger customer loyalty.

However, some scholars have criticized the notion that promotional marketings are a key driver of customer loyalty. For example, Reichheld (2003) argues that loyalty is driven by a company's ability to deliver on its promises, rather than by promotional activities. Similarly, Rust et al. (2004) suggest that customer satisfaction and loyalty are driven by a range of factors, including product quality, service quality, and value, rather than just promotional activities.

Place (Distribution) Strategy:

Superfert's distribution strategy is critical to converting marketing interest into sales, with 75% of respondents agreeing that fertilizers are easily available in stores. Reliable

and accessible distribution channels eliminate barriers to purchase, boosting customer satisfaction and maximizing market reach.

However, some researchers have questioned the effectiveness of distribution strategies in driving long-term sales growth. For example, Christopher (2016) argues that logistics and supply chain management are critical components of competitiveness, but not the only factors. Similarly, Mentzer et al. (2001) suggest that logistics service quality is a key driver of customer satisfaction, but other factors such as product quality and pricing are also important.

Implications:

The findings confirm that the strategic deployment of the 4 Ps creates a synergistic effect, significantly contributing to Superfert Fertiliser Company's competitiveness. However, the company should also consider the potential limitations and critiques of its marketing strategies and be prepared to adapt to changing customer needs and market conditions.

5.5.2 To evaluate the impact of Superfert's marketing strategies on its competitive performance metrics and overall market standing.

The findings of this analysis suggest that Superfert's marketing strategies have been effective in improving its competitive performance, metrics and market standing. The company's focus on customer satisfaction and brand awareness has contributed to its success. The implications of this finding are significant, suggesting that Superfert should continue to invest in its marketing strategies to maintain its competitive advantage (Porter, 2008). The company should also consider expanding its marketing efforts to reach new customers and increase its market share further.

5.5.3 To ascertain the most critical marketing mix factors that exert the most substantial impact on Superfert's competitive positioning.

Product Strategy and Enhanced Loyalty, the analysis of the Product strategy strongly suggests that Superfert's offerings are a major driver of its competitiveness. The high

level of agreement among respondents (75%) regarding the high quality of the fertilizers, coupled with satisfaction with the variety and innovation of the product range, confirms that the company is effectively meeting farmers' specific needs. Providing varied, innovative, and high-quality products goes beyond mere transaction; it builds trust and dependence on the brand. This alignment between product features and customer needs is crucial, as it leads directly to enhanced customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, providing a sustained competitive advantage in the Zimbabwean agricultural sector.

Price Strategy and Attracting Price-Sensitive Customers for Superfert's Price strategy contributes significantly to its market positioning by ensuring that its products are perceived as offering superior value for money. The finding that approximately 65% of respondents considered the prices both competitive and reflective of the value received indicates that the company has achieved a favorable price-quality balance. Furthermore, the strategic use of discounts and promotions was identified as a key factor encouraging purchasing decisions. This approach allows Superfert to attract price-sensitive customers without eroding the perceived quality of its core offerings, thereby increasing market share and encouraging the repeat purchases necessary for sustained financial performance.

Promotion Strategy and Increased Brand Awareness, the effectiveness of Superfert's Promotion strategy is evident in the majority agreement (70%) that advertising and promotional activities successfully reach and engage the target market. Effective advertising plays a vital role in building and maintaining brand awareness, ensuring that Superfert is top-of-mind when farmers are making purchasing decisions. Complementary sales promotions (like seasonal offers) and focused customer engagement activities (such as field days or training) work together to not only drive immediate sales but also to deepen the emotional connection with the brand. This holistic promotional approach fosters stronger customer loyalty, making Superfert's customer base less susceptible to competitive moves.

Place Strategy and Maximizing Market Reach, the company's Place (Distribution) strategy is critical to converting marketing interest into actual sales by ensuring product accessibility. The strong consensus, with 75% agreement, that fertilizers are easily available in stores, and 70% agreement on the efficiency of timely delivery, underscores

the reliability of Superfert's supply chain. Reliable and accessible distribution channels eliminate a major barrier to purchase, directly boosting customer satisfaction. By ensuring product availability across various locations, Superfert maximizes its market reach and minimizes stock-outs, securing a substantial competitive edge over rivals that may struggle with logistics in a challenging market environment.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that the strategic deployment of the 4 Ps—Product, Price, Promotion and Place create a synergistic effect that significantly contributes to Superfert Fertiliser Company's competitiveness. This conclusion is firmly aligned with the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter 2, which consistently highlights that effective and integrated marketing strategies are essential for improving performance, market share, and achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in the agribusiness sector.

4.6 Summary of Chapter

Chapter 4 presented, analyzed, and discussed data collected from respondents. The findings indicate that Superfert’s marketing strategies across product, price, promotion, and place positively influence its competitiveness. This chapter provides a clear foundation for Chapter 5, which will offer conclusions, recommendations, and implications based on these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the research findings, draws conclusions based on the analysis, and provides practical recommendations aimed at improving the competitiveness of fertiliser companies in Zimbabwe. The chapter synthesizes empirical insights from both quantitative and qualitative data presented in Chapter Four and links them directly to the research objectives and questions outlined in Chapter One. It also highlights potential areas for future research, ensuring continuity and contribution to both academic knowledge and practical management strategies. The chapter demonstrates how the Marketing Mix interacts to influence competitive outcomes in the agricultural input sector and identifies gaps and opportunities for strategic improvement.

5.2 Research Summary

The study investigated the impact of marketing strategies on the competitiveness of Superfert Fertiliser Company, focusing specifically on the agricultural input market in Zimbabwe. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative analysis from questionnaires administered to 60 customers (50 valid responses, 83.3% response rate) and qualitative insights from five in-depth interviews with managers from marketing and operational departments. The analysis aimed to assess how Marketing Mix affects sales growth, market share, and customer engagement.

Quantitative data revealed that product quality and variety were considered the most influential factors driving customer satisfaction, while promotional activities significantly influenced brand awareness but had limited impact on purchase decisions when not properly targeted. Price strategies were found to be competitive; however, perceptions of affordability varied among different customer demographics, especially smallholder farmers. Distribution or place-related strategies emerged as a critical barrier, as many rural farmers reported limited access to Superfert products.

Qualitative interviews with management highlighted operational constraints such as limited financial resources, inadequate staffing in marketing, and logistical

inefficiencies as barriers to executing effective marketing strategies. Managers emphasized that although Superfert has designed robust marketing initiatives, challenges in implementation, communication, and follow-up hinder the realization of full competitive advantages.

Overall, the study confirms that the Marketing Mix is a statistically significant predictor of competitiveness for Superfert. Product and promotion strategies were identified as primary drivers of customer engagement, while pricing and distribution, although important, require enhanced strategic alignment. The research also showed that customer trust, communication, and responsiveness are key moderating factors influencing competitiveness in the Zimbabwean agricultural input market.

5.3 Conclusions

The study concludes that marketing strategies play a decisive role in enhancing the competitiveness in fertiliser industry as demonstrated by the findings from the research carried out at Superfert Fertiliser Company. However, the effectiveness of these strategies is closely tied to execution, stakeholder engagement, and adaptability to market needs. Firstly, product strategies are crucial for differentiating Superfert in a competitive market. Customers valued high-quality fertilizers, yet inconsistent availability in remote areas negatively impacted loyalty and purchase consistency.

This indicates that while Superfert has invested in product development, operational challenges undermine its ability to retain customers fully. Secondly, promotion strategies positively influenced brand recognition, but promotional activities were not always tailored to the needs of different customer segments. While large-scale commercial farmers responded well to advertising campaigns, smallholder farmers relied more on direct engagement and demonstrations to inform their purchasing decisions.

This finding emphasizes the importance of targeted, context-specific promotional strategies to maximize impact. Thirdly, pricing strategies were generally competitive, yet the study revealed disparities in perceived affordability among different customer groups. While bulk purchasers benefitted from discounts, small-scale farmers often struggled to access products at reasonable prices, highlighting the need for flexible and

inclusive pricing mechanisms. Fourthly, distribution strategies were identified as a significant determinant of competitiveness. Customers in rural and peri-urban areas reported difficulty accessing products, suggesting that strengthening distribution networks and logistics is essential for market penetration. Managers emphasized that improving operational efficiency, enhancing supply chain reliability, and expanding agro-dealer partnerships are critical for addressing these challenges. Finally, the study concludes that customer engagement, trust, and communication are vital moderators of competitiveness.

Customers who perceive Superfert as reliable and responsive are more likely to maintain loyalty, while gaps in communication, service delivery, and product availability promote switching behavior to competitors. Effective marketing requires integration across all elements of the Marketing Mix, supported by operational efficiency and active customer relationship management.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, several strategic recommendations are proposed to enhance the competitiveness of Superfert Fertiliser Company. These recommendations are grounded in the research evidence aligning with the Marketing Mix elements and the customer insights gathered through questionnaires and interviews.

Enhance Product Availability and Quality:

Superfert should prioritize consistent product availability across both urban and rural markets. The research indicated that many farmers, especially in remote areas, had trouble accessing Superfert products, which led to customer dissatisfaction and switching behavior to competitors. Expanding product lines to address the diverse needs of different farmers, such as smallholders and commercial farmers, is crucial. In addition, implementing robust quality assurance programs will ensure that all products meet high standards, reducing complaints and building trust among customers. Regular monitoring, testing, and feedback mechanisms should be employed to maintain product reliability, which directly influences customer loyalty and long-term competitiveness.

Strengthen Promotion Strategies:

Promotional activities should be carefully tailored to target specific customer segments. The study revealed that generic promotional campaigns did not effectively reach smallholder farmers, who often rely on hands-on demonstrations and practical engagement rather than mass advertising. Superfert should leverage a combination of traditional media (radio, newspapers, and posters) and digital platforms (social media, WhatsApp groups, and mobile messaging) to reach a broader audience. Organizing farmer field days, product demonstrations, workshops, and training sessions can enhance awareness of product benefits and educate farmers on proper fertiliser usage. Such interactive approaches not only increase product knowledge but also strengthen customer relationships, encouraging repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Implement Flexible Pricing Models:

Pricing was found to be a crucial determinant of customer satisfaction, particularly among smallholder farmers who face financial constraints. Introducing tiered pricing, seasonal discounts, and loyalty incentives can make products more accessible while encouraging repeated purchases. Bundled packages that combine multiple products or services can provide value for money and appeal to cost-sensitive farmers. Reward programs for regular customers or bulk buyers can foster loyalty and reduce the likelihood of customers switching to competitors. Flexible pricing strategies ensure inclusivity, balancing the needs of both small-scale and commercial farmers while enhancing overall competitiveness.

Improve Distribution and Logistics:

Distribution challenges were a significant barrier to customer satisfaction in the study. To address this, Superfert should expand its distribution network by partnering with agro-dealers, mobile vendors, cooperatives, and local farmer associations. Developing reliable logistics infrastructure, including transportation and warehousing systems, is critical to ensure timely delivery, particularly in remote and underserved areas. Implementing advanced inventory management systems can help monitor stock levels, predict demand, and reduce stock-outs. Effective logistics not only improve accessibility but also enhance the company’s reputation as a dependable supplier, ultimately supporting market expansion and customer retention.

Invest in Customer Relationship Management (CRM):

A structured CRM system is essential for tracking customer interactions, feedback, and purchase history. This system would enable Superfert to maintain personalized communication with customers, provide timely updates on promotions and product availability, and respond promptly to inquiries or complaints. The research highlighted that gaps in communication negatively impacted customer trust and loyalty. By leveraging CRM tools, the company can proactively engage customers, anticipate their needs, and foster long-term relationships. Consistent and transparent communication strengthens trust, encourages repeat business, and contributes to a positive brand image in the competitive fertiliser market.

Leverage Technology:

Digital transformation presents significant opportunities for enhancing competitiveness. Superfert should adopt mobile applications, online ordering systems, and social media platforms to facilitate marketing, sales, and customer engagement. Mobile platforms can enable farmers to access product information, track deliveries, and place orders conveniently. Social media engagement allows for interactive communication, providing a platform for education, promotions, and feedback. Implementing technology-driven solutions improves responsiveness, broadens market reach, and enables real-time monitoring of customer behavior. In an increasingly tech-savvy market, effective use of technology is a strategic differentiator that can boost both customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.

Enhance Staff Training and Capacity:

Employees are the frontline representatives of the company and play a critical role in executing marketing strategies effectively. Continuous professional development programs should focus on marketing, customer service, and operational management skills. Training should cover product knowledge, client interaction techniques, problem-solving skills, and conflict resolution to ensure employees can deliver high-quality services. Well-trained staff can build stronger relationships with customers, resolve complaints efficiently, and provide reliable advice on product use, which enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty. Additionally, fostering a culture of teamwork and continuous learning within the organization will contribute to overall performance improvement.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:

Engaging in CSR initiatives can strengthen Superfert's brand image and create goodwill among customers and the community. Programs such as farmer education, environmental sustainability projects, and local empowerment initiatives demonstrate the company's commitment to social development and community welfare. By actively participating in CSR, Superfert can enhance visibility, build trust, and develop emotional connections with customers. Awareness of the company's positive contributions encourages customer loyalty, fosters long-term engagement, and differentiates Superfert from competitors, particularly in a socially conscious market environment.

5.5 Areas for Future Research

While this study focused specifically on Superfert Fertiliser Company and its marketing strategies within the Zimbabwean agricultural sector, there are several opportunities for future research that can deepen understanding and provide broader industry insights. One potential area is the comparative analysis of multiple fertiliser companies operating within Zimbabwe and the Southern African region.

By examining marketing practices, customer retention strategies, and competitive positioning across different firms, future studies could identify industry-wide best practices industry-wide and benchmark performance standards. Such comparative research could highlight common challenges and innovative approaches that individual case studies might not fully reveal, providing valuable insights for both practitioners and policymakers in the sector. Another important area for investigation is the role of digital marketing, e-commerce, and mobile technology in agricultural input sales. The current study highlighted the potential of technology in improving customer engagement and product accessibility, yet detailed research on digital channels remains limited.

Future studies could explore how mobile applications, online ordering systems, social media platforms, and digital payment solutions influence farmer purchasing behavior, loyalty, and responsiveness to promotional campaigns. Understanding the effectiveness of these tools could guide fertiliser companies in adopting technology-driven marketing strategies that enhance competitiveness, particularly in remote and rural areas. Future

research could also benefit from longitudinal studies that track the impact of integrated marketing strategies over time. The present study provides a snapshot of the relationship between the Marketing Mix (4Ps) and competitiveness; however, assessing long-term outcomes such as sales growth, market share expansion, brand loyalty, and profitability would provide more robust evidence of strategy effectiveness.

Longitudinal research could also uncover trends, seasonal variations, and the sustainability of customer retention initiatives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how marketing decisions translate into sustained competitive advantage. In addition, there is a need to explore the effects of macroeconomic volatility, climate variability, and agricultural sector shocks on the success of marketing strategies. Zimbabwean farmers face challenges such as fluctuating input costs, inconsistent rainfall, and changing government policies, which may affect both demand and purchasing patterns. Future studies could investigate how external environmental factors influence the effectiveness of pricing, promotion, and distribution strategies, helping companies design adaptive marketing approaches that remain resilient under changing conditions.

Lastly, customer segmentation research could provide deeper insights into the diverse needs of farmers. While this study categorized respondents broadly by demographics, more detailed segmentation based on farm size, income levels, crop types, and purchasing behaviors would allow for highly tailored marketing strategies. Understanding the specific motivations, preferences, and pain points of different farmer groups can help fertiliser companies develop customized product offerings, targeted promotions, and loyalty programs that better meet the needs of each segment, ultimately improving competitiveness and customer satisfaction.

Overall, these future research directions would complement the findings of this study by expanding the scope, integrating technology perspectives, and considering both market and environmental dynamics. Such research would provide actionable insights for fertiliser companies seeking to enhance their strategic marketing effectiveness, sustain customer loyalty, and maintain a competitive edge in a complex agricultural market.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the study's findings, drawing together the key insights from the preceding chapters. The research summary highlighted the objectives, methodology, and major findings regarding the influence of marketing strategies on the competitiveness of Superfert Fertiliser Company. The chapter then presented conclusions, emphasizing the critical role of well-executed product, pricing, promotion, and distribution strategies in enhancing market performance and customer loyalty. Recommendations were proposed, each recommendation was designed to address identified gaps and challenges, ultimately aiming to improve competitiveness and customer retention.

Finally, the chapter outlined areas for future research, suggesting avenues such as comparative studies across multiple fertiliser companies, the impact of digital marketing and e-commerce, longitudinal assessments of marketing strategies, the influence of macroeconomic and climatic factors, and more detailed customer segmentation studies. In conclusion, this chapter not only synthesized the research findings but also provided actionable insights and a roadmap for further investigation, ensuring that the study's contributions are both practical and academically relevant.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire 1: Internal Stakeholders (Managers, Marketing & Sales Employees)

Questionnaire 1: Internal Stakeholders (Managers, Marketing & Sales Employees)
Purpose: To collect data on the influence of marketing strategies on Superfert Fertiliser Company's competitiveness.
Instructions: Please answer all questions honestly. Your responses will remain confidential.
Section A: Demographics

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 20–29 ☐ 30–39 ☐ 40–49 ☐ 50+
3. Education Level: ☐ Certificate/Diploma ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Postgraduate
4. Work Experience: ☐ 1–5 ☐ 6–10 ☐ 11–15 ☐ 16+
5. Position/Role: ☐ Manager ☐ Marketing Employee ☐ Sales Employee

Section B: Product Strategy
On a scale of 1–5 (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), please rate the following statements:

1. Superfert fertiliser quality meets crop-specific requirements.
2. Fertiliser nutrient content is consistent and reliable.
3. Packaging is convenient for smallholder farmers.
4. Product innovations address the needs of diverse farming regions.

Section C: Price Strategy

1. Fertiliser prices are affordable for smallholder farmers.
2. Prices are competitive compared to other fertiliser brands.
3. Pricing considers seasonal cost fluctuations and market demand.
4. Dynamic pricing strategies, such as discounts or bundled offers, enhance sales.

Section D: Place/Distribution Strategy

1. Superfert products are easily available at local agro-dealers.
2. Delivery and restocking are timely and reliable.
3. Distribution covers all major farming regions.
4. Efficient logistics positively affect customer satisfaction.

Section E: Promotion Strategy

1. Promotional campaigns are frequent and informative.
2. Farmer training programs improve knowledge and adoption.
3. Brand awareness of Superfert products is high.
4. Demonstration plots and media campaigns strengthen customer trust.

Section F: Competitiveness

1. Superfert's market share is strong relative to competitors.
2. Sales growth has improved over the past seasons.
3. Profitability levels support reinvestment and innovation.
4. Integrated marketing strategies (4Ps) collectively enhance competitiveness.

Appendix 2: Questionnaire 2: External Stakeholders (Agro-dealers and Commercial Farmers)

Questionnaire 2: External Stakeholders (Agro-dealers and Commercial Farmers)
Purpose: To assess perceptions of Superfert's marketing strategies and their influence on competitiveness.
Instructions: Tick the box or rate on a scale of 1–5 as indicated.
Section A: Demographics

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 20–29 ☐ 30–39 ☐ 40–49 ☐ 50+
3. Education Level: ☐ Certificate/Diploma ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Postgraduate
4. Years of Farming/Agro-dealer Experience: ☐ 1–5 ☐ 6–10 ☐ 11–15 ☐ 16+

Section B: Product Strategy
Rate the following statements (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree):

1. Superfert fertilisers consistently meet crop nutrient requirements.
2. Fertiliser packaging is convenient and suitable for my operations.
3. Product quality influences my decision to repurchase.
4. Availability of product variants supports different crop and soil needs.

Section C: Price Strategy

1. Fertiliser prices are affordable for farmers in my area.
2. Prices are competitive with other brands in the market.
3. Price fluctuations affect my purchasing patterns.
4. Seasonal discounts or promotions encourage bulk purchases.

Section D: Place/Distribution Strategy

1. Superfert products are easily available at nearby agro-dealer outlets.
2. Delivery and restocking are reliable and timely.
3. Distribution reaches all farming areas I operate in.
4. Accessibility of products affects the volume of fertiliser I buy.

Section E: Promotion Strategy

1. Awareness of Superfert products is high among farmers.
2. Promotional campaigns (media, demonstrations, training) influence adoption.
3. Farmer training programs enhance my knowledge of fertiliser use.
4. Demonstration plots positively influence my perception of Superfert products.

Section F: Competitiveness

1. Superfert has a strong presence in the local fertiliser market.
2. The company's products contrib5ute to improved crop yield and productivity.
3. Marketing strategies encourage loyalty and repeat purchases.
4. Product, price, distribution, and promotion collectively influence your purchasing decisions.

Appendix 3: Likert Scale for Questionnaire

Likert Scale for Questionnaire
Respondents will indicate their level of agreement or perception with the statements using the following scale:

Rating	Description	Interpretation
5	Strongly Agree (SA)	Respondent fully agrees; very positive perception.
4	Agree (A)	Respondent generally agrees; positive perception.
3	Neutral (N)	Respondent neither agrees nor disagrees; moderate perception.
2	Disagree (D)	Respondent generally disagrees; negative perception.
1	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Respondent fully disagrees; very negative perception.

Coding Guide for Data Entry

- SA → 5
- A → 4
- N → 3
- D → 2
- SD → 1

Usage: Each statement in your questionnaire regarding Product, Price, Promotion, and Distribution strategy should be rated using this scale. For example:

- "The quality of Superfert fertilizers meets my expectations." → Respondent selects 1–5.
- "Superfert's pricing is affordable for my farming needs." → Respondent selects 1–5.

Analysis tip:

- Calculate **mean scores** to determine overall perceptions (as in your draft: e.g., Product Strategy mean > 4.0).
- Higher mean → strong positive perception; lower mean → weak perception or area for improvement.

Appendix 4: Ethical Clearence Letter

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

P. Bag 1020
BINDURA, Zimbabwe
Email : rid@buse.ac.zw

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION [BUSE]

16 October 2025

Tapiwa Namakawa
Bindura University of Science Education
Graduate School of Business
P. Bag 1020
Bindura

Dear Tapiwa Namakawa

RE: INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH COMMITTEE ETHICAL CLEARANCE-APPROVAL NUMBER: BUSEREC/0084/2025

Your application for research ethical clearance related to the topic **'A Framework for Aligning Marketing Strategies with Competitive Positioning: A Case of Superfert Fertilizer Company'** has been approved and allocated approval Number: **BUSEREC/0084/2025**. You are to quote this approval number for all correspondences inclusive of consent forms and any other documents as and when appropriate. The approval period is as stated below:

Type of Meeting	:	18th BUSEREC meeting
Approval Date	:	16/10/2025
Expiry date	:	15/10/2026

The project will automatically discontinue on the expiry date. You can apply for renewal three months before the expiry date. The renewal application should be accompanied by a progress report.

You are not expected to make any changes/adjustments to the protocol including the consent documents. Any trials involving drugs, devices and biologics require approval of the Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe before commencement. All problems to do with the safety of participants must be reported to BUSEREC (buserec2022@buse.ac.zw) within three (3) working days.

Upon termination of the study, a report has to be submitted to BUSEREC.

Yours sincerely

BUSEREC CHAIRPERSON

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