

TRADE PROMOTION AND SALES VOLUME: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF DISTRIBUTOR MARKETING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of sales contest, promotion policy, and distributor salesperson incentives on sales volume, with distributor marketing performance serving as a mediating variable. The research utilized a probability sampling method with a census approach, involving all 180 official distributors of PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda as respondents. Data were analyzed using the SEM-PLS technique through SmartPLS 4.0. The results reveal that distributor salesperson incentives and distributor marketing performance significantly affect sales volume, whereas sales contest shows no significant impact. Promotion policy does not directly influence sales volume but demonstrates a significant effect on distributor marketing performance. Furthermore, distributor marketing performance is confirmed to mediate the relationship between promotion policy and distributor salesperson incentives on sales volume. These findings highlight the crucial role of distributor marketing effectiveness in strengthening the impact of incentive-based strategies, offering important managerial insights for optimizing distribution performance and enhancing market penetration.

Keywords: Distributor Marketing Performance, Distributor Salesperson Incentives, Promotion Policy, Sales Contest, Sales Volume

INTRODUCTION

The increasing competitiveness of business environments requires companies to develop effective marketing strategies to ensure efficient product distribution. Distribution channels play a crucial role in delivering products from producers to consumers and significantly contribute to economic activity (Bronnenberg & Ellickson, 2015). Their effectiveness depends on distributor performance as strategic intermediaries in expanding market reach and ensuring product availability (Ezekiel et al., 2020). However, in Indonesia's subsidized fertilizer sector, distribution inefficiency remains a persistent issue, as scarcity at the farmer level continues despite adequate national production and allocation. Data from PT Pupuk Indonesia (Persero) show that while production targets are consistently met, distribution realization remains suboptimal. In 2024, 7.54 million tons were distributed from a 9.55 million-ton allocation, while in 2025 only 32% had been realized by May. Similar conditions occur at PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda (PIM), where distribution performance declined from 112.49% in 2020 to 76.40% in 2023 and remained low at 29.8% in 2025. These findings indicate that the problem lies not in production but in distribution effectiveness, highlighting the need to improve distributor engagement and marketing support.

Trade promotion is considered a key strategy to enhance distributor performance and increase sales volume, including sales contests, promotion policies, and salesperson incentives (Etuk et al., 2022). Although PIM has implemented various incentive programs, their effectiveness remains unclear. Previous studies show that sales contests can motivate distributors (Ezekiel et al., 2020), promotion policies shape long-term behavior (Johoran, 2019), and incentives improve selling performance (Magnotta et al., 2020; Kearney et al., 2023). However, their impact on sales volume largely depends on distributor marketing performance as a mediating factor (Etuk et al., 2022). Despite existing research on distribution performance (Isyanto, 2024), studies integrating multiple trade promotion strategies within a single model remain limited, with mixed empirical findings (Michael & Ogwo, 2013; Ezekiel et al., 2020; Ikbali et al., 2021). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of sales contest, promotion policy, and distributor salesperson incentives on sales volume, with distributor marketing performance as a mediating variable in the context of PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) is a strategic approach that coordinates various promotional tools to deliver consistent messages to target audiences (Shimp & Andrews, 2019). IMC aims not only to inform but also to strengthen long-term relationships with customers and distribution partners. In the B2B context, IMC is essential for influencing distributor behavior and supporting sales activities through tools such as sales contests, promotion policies, and distributor salesperson incentives. Effective IMC requires aligning target market selection, message design, media choice, and promotional tools to ensure that communication remains relevant and persuasive. Previous studies, such as Husnita (2019), indicate that integrated communication enhances distributor marketing performance, which ultimately contributes to increased sales volume. Therefore, IMC plays a crucial role in shaping distributor engagement and supporting product distribution at PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda.

Distribution Channel Strategy

Distribution channel strategy involves managing intermediaries to ensure efficient product flow from producers to end users (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Distributors play a key role in both logistics and promotional activities, especially during incentive and sales programs. Promotional success depends on distributor readiness, while misalignment between distribution and promotion can reduce effectiveness (Shimp & Andrews, 2019; Blakeman, 2015). Therefore, distributor performance is essential in supporting communication effectiveness and increasing sales volume.

Trade Promotion

Trade promotion refers to promotional activities aimed at distributors, wholesalers, and retailers to encourage them to stock, promote, and sell products (Claro et al., 2021). It is part of a push strategy, where manufacturers offer incentives to motivate channel members to increase product movement (Nwielaghi, 2013). Common forms of trade promotion include price discounts, sales contests, and incentives for distributor sales personnel (Shimp & Andrews, 2019). These activities help strengthen distributor support, expand distribution coverage, and stimulate higher sales volume. Clear communication between manufacturers and distributors is essential to ensure the success of trade promotion programs (Blakeman, 2015). Overall, trade promotion helps build strong relationships between companies and distribution partners, which is crucial for achieving sales targets and sustaining market penetration.

Sales Volume

Sales volume refers to the total quantity of products sold within a specific period and is a key indicator of marketing and sales performance (Kotler & Keller, 2016). It is influenced by marketing activities such as distribution, promotion, and salesforce performance (Stanton et al., 2001), as well as factors including product quality, pricing, and distribution efficiency (Dunan et al., 2020; Swasta & Irawan, 2016). Previous studies measure sales volume using indicators such as sales target achievement, profit increase, and contribution to company growth (Darmawan, 2020; Sismar et al., 2024), which are also adopted in this study.

Distributor Marketing Performance

Distributor marketing performance refers to the effectiveness of distributors in executing marketing activities to achieve sales targets, market growth, and customer relationships (Ferdinand, 2014). It includes functions such as distribution, promotion, customer service, and contribution to overall sales performance (Wijiono et al., 2024), as well as relational aspects like trust and collaboration (Nevins & Money, 2008). High performance is reflected in value creation through market expansion and sales improvement (Sumarwan, 2018), influenced by factors such as selling skills, innovation, engagement, and leadership (Wahyuningtiyas et al., 2024; Rodriguez et al., 2023; Van et al., 2024). This study measures it using indicators from Obadia et al. (2015), including promotional activities, demand generation, market development, information sharing, and responsiveness.

Sales Contest

A sales contest is a short-term incentive program designed by producers to motivate distributors to achieve specific sales goals, increase market coverage, and boost sales performance (Pembi et al., 2017). These contests typically involve competitions offering rewards such as cash, merchandise, certificates, or trips, and have been proven to significantly enhance distributor performance and sales volume (Ezekiel et al., 2020). The effectiveness of a sales contest is influenced by emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, personality traits, and sales competencies

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(Asyhari & Yuwalliatin, 2020). Based on Suresh et al. (2015), sales contest indicators include the type of contest, contest attractiveness, and the incentives provided, measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Promotion Policy

Promotion policy refers to the strategic guidelines that regulate the form, frequency, and intensity of promotional activities to stimulate demand, enhance brand awareness, and increase sales performance (Ikbal & Sitanggang, 2020). As part of the promotion mix, it includes advertising, sales promotion, public relations, and personal selling (McCarthy & Perreault, 2002). Promotion policies may target consumers through discounts, coupons, gifts, and loyalty programs, or target distributors through trade allowances and sales contests (Michael & Ogwo, 2013). The effectiveness of promotion policy is influenced by pricing strategy, distribution efficiency, and consumer behavior (Bondarenko & Vyshnivska, 2023). Based on Aldilla et al. (2024), the main indicators of promotion policy consist of promotion frequency, types of promotion applied, and incentives offered, measured using a five-point Likert scale.

Distributor Sales Person Incentives

Distributor sales person incentives are motivational programs provided to distributor salespeople in the form of financial rewards such as commissions or bonuses and non-financial rewards like recognition or training, aimed at increasing their sales efforts and achieving targeted performance. Effective incentives must align with salesperson characteristics, product complexity, and clear communication to ensure participation and optimal outcomes (Zinfi, 2024; Alavi et al., 2022). Previous studies identify several key indicators for measuring incentives, including the type and amount of incentives (spiff), frequency of distribution, salesperson participation, sales focus on incentivized products, and the resulting impact on sales performance (Magnotta et al., 2020).

Development of Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework and previous studies, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Sales contest has a significant effect on distributor marketing performance.

H2: Promotion policy has a significant effect on distributor marketing performance.

H3: Distributor salesperson incentives have a significant effect on distributor marketing performance.

H4: Distributor marketing performance has a significant effect on sales volume.

H5: Sales contest has a significant effect on sales volume.

H6: Promotion policy has a significant effect on sales volume.

H7: Distributor salesperson incentives have a significant effect on sales volume.

H8: Distributor marketing performance mediates the effect of sales contest on sales volume.

H9: Distributor marketing performance mediates the effect of promotion policy on sales volume.

H10: Distributor marketing performance mediates the effect of distributor salesperson incentives on sales volume.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using survey-based data. The research was conducted on distributors of PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda located in Aceh, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Riau, and the Riau Islands.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of all 180 official distributors. Due to the manageable population size, this study applied a census technique, allowing all members of the population to be included as respondents. This approach aligns with methodological recommendations suggesting that Structural Equation Modeling, particularly SEM-PLS, can be reliably used with sample sizes exceeding 150 for models with a moderate number of constructs and indicators (Hair et al., 2019).

Data Collection Technique

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed online via Google Forms. The questionnaire was delivered individually through WhatsApp to ensure accessibility and increase response rates. Respondents were asked to evaluate statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”), enabling the transformation of qualitative perceptions into quantitative data.

Measurement of Variables

This study measured five latent variables: sales contest, promotion policy, distributor salesperson incentives, distributor marketing performance, and sales volume. Each construct was operationalized using indicators adopted

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from previous studies, including Suresh et al. (2015), Aldilla et al. (2024), Magnotta et al. (2020), Obadia et al. (2015), Darmawan (2020), and Sismar et al. (2024).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach through SmartPLS 4.0. This method was chosen due to its ability to analyze complex models with reflective indicators and its robustness against non-normal data distribution (Solimun & Fernandes, 2017).

The analysis consisted of two main stages:

- 1. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)**
This stage assessed convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability using outer loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha (Hair et al., 2017).
- 2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)**
This stage examined the relationships between variables using the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (F^2), and model fit indices such as Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Normed Fit Index (NFI).

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was performed using the bootstrapping technique to evaluate the significance of direct and indirect effects. Mediation analysis was conducted following the framework proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), assessing the role of distributor marketing performance as a mediating variable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Characteristics of Respondents

This study involved 180 distributor respondents of PT Pupuk Iskandar Muda across four operational regions in Sumatra, collected between July 5 and August 1, 2025. The sample consisted of 74% male and 26% female respondents, reflecting the male-dominated nature of distribution and sales activities in the agribusiness sector. In terms of age, the largest group was 36–40 years (26%), followed by 31–35 years (20%), 41–45 years (17%), 26–30 years (16%), over 50 years (13%), and 20–25 years (2%), indicating that most respondents were in their productive working age with substantial field experience. Regarding education, 67% held a bachelor's degree, 30% completed senior high school, and 3% held a master's degree. Geographically, respondents were predominantly based in North Sumatra (46%), followed by West Sumatra (25.6%), Aceh (25%), and Riau (4%), illustrating the distribution concentration of the company's market coverage. Most respondents had extensive experience in distribution, with 65% having worked for more than five years, while others had 3–5 years (17%), 1–3 years (14%), and less than one year (4%) of experience. Overall, the sample represents experienced, well-educated, and geographically diverse.

Measurement Model Evaluation

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong relationships between indicators and their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 1. Outer Loading

Variable	Indicator	Loading	Remark
Sales Contest	SC1	0.843	Valid
	SC2	0.872	Valid
	SC3	0.764	Valid
Promotion Policy	PP1	0.841	Valid
	PP2	0.844	Valid
	PP3	0.847	Valid
Distributor Salesperson Incentives	DSPI1	0.710	Valid
	DSPI2	0.831	Valid
	DSPI3	0.865	Valid

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Variable	Indicator	Loading	Remark
	DSPI4	0.854	Valid
	DSPI5	0.835	Valid
Distributor Marketing Performance	DMP1	0.729	Valid
	DMP2	0.746	Valid
	DMP3	0.764	Valid
	DMP4	0.810	Valid
	DMP5	0.726	Valid
Sales Volume	SV1	0.853	Valid
	SV2	0.871	Valid
	SV3	0.812	Valid

All constructs also achieved AVE values above 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity.

Table 2. AVE

Variable	AVE	Remark
Sales Contest	0.685	Valid
Promotion Policy	0.712	Valid
Distributor Salesperson Incentives	0.674	Valid
Distributor Marketing Performance	0.571	Valid
Sales Volume	0.715	Valid

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, confirming that all variables are empirically distinct.

Table 3. Fornell Larcker

Variable	Distributor Marketing Performance	Distributor Sales Person Incentives	Promotion Policy	Sales Contest	Sales Volume	Remark
Distributor Marketing Performance	0.756					Valid
Distributor Sales Person Incentives	0.552	0.821				Valid
Promotion Policy	0.505	0.566	0.844			Valid
Sales Contest	0.554	0.592	0.466	0.846		Valid
Sales Volume	0.459	0.539	0.603	0.422	0.828	Valid

Internal Consistency Reliability

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. All values exceeded the threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency.

Table 4. Reliability

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Remark
Sales Contest	0.769	0.867	Reliable
Promotion Policy	0.798	0.881	Reliable
Distributor Salesperson Incentives	0.879	0.911	Reliable

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Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Remark
Distributor Marketing Performance	0.814	0.869	Reliable
Sales Volume	0.800	0.883	Reliable

Structural Model Evaluation Coefficient of Determination (R²)

Table 5. R²

Variable	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Distributor Marketing Performance	0.370	0.359
Sales Volume	0.433	0.420

The results indicate moderate predictive accuracy. Distributor marketing performance is explained by 37% of the independent variables, while sales volume is explained by 43.3% of the model.

Hypothesis Testing

Direct Effects

Table 6. Direct Effects

Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
Sales Contest → DMP	0.133	1.611	0.107	Rejected
Promotion Policy → DMP	0.225	2.475	0.013	Supported
DSPI → DMP	0.354	4.157	0.000	Supported
DMP → Sales Volume	0.292	3.572	0.000	Supported
Sales Contest → Sales Volume	0.040	0.546	0.585	Rejected
Promotion Policy → Sales Volume	0.093	1.015	0.310	Rejected
DSPI → Sales Volume	0.357	3.694	0.000	Supported

The findings indicate that distributor salesperson incentives and distributor marketing performance significantly influence sales volume, while sales contest and promotion policy do not show direct effects.

Indirect Effects (Mediation)

Table 7. Indirect Effects

Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
Sales Contest → DMP → Sales Volume	0.039	1.385	0.166	Not Significant
Promotion Policy → DMP → Sales Volume	0.066	1.978	0.048	Significant (Full Mediation)
DSPI → DMP → Sales Volume	0.103	2.685	0.007	Significant (Partial Mediation)

The results show that distributor marketing performance fully mediates the effect of promotion policy and partially mediates the effect of salesperson incentives on sales volume.

DISCUSSIONS

The results reveal that sales contest does not significantly influence distributor marketing performance or sales volume, indicating that short-term competitive programs are not effective in this distribution context. This may occur because such programs are not aligned with distributor motivation or lack perceived attractiveness. Recent studies suggest that sales contests only produce significant outcomes when they are well-structured and aligned with participant expectations (Ezekiel et al., 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2023). In contrast, promotion policy significantly improves distributor marketing performance, highlighting the importance of structured promotional support in enhancing distributor engagement. However, its direct effect on sales volume is not significant, suggesting that promotion alone is insufficient to drive sales without effective execution. This finding is consistent with recent research emphasizing that promotional effectiveness depends on distributor performance as an intermediary (Aldilla et al., 2024; Sismar et al., 2024). Furthermore, distributor salesperson incentives show a strong positive effect on both distributor marketing performance and sales volume, confirming that incentive systems are the most influential driver in this study. This aligns with recent findings that performance-based incentives enhance salesperson motivation, effort, and sales outcomes (Magnotta et al., 2020; Alavi et al., 2022; Zinfi, 2024). Additionally, distributor marketing

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performance significantly affects sales volume, reinforcing its critical role as a driver of sales success. Effective execution of marketing activities by distributors translates into higher sales performance (Wijiono et al., 2024). From a mediation perspective, promotion policy has a significant indirect effect on sales volume through distributor marketing performance (full mediation), while distributor salesperson incentives exhibit partial mediation, indicating both direct and indirect influences on sales. Conversely, sales contest shows no mediating effect, confirming its limited role in influencing sales outcomes. Overall, the findings suggest that incentive-based strategies and distributor performance are more effective than short-term promotional programs in driving sales volume, emphasizing the importance of aligning marketing strategies with distributor capabilities in B2B distribution channels.

CONCLUSION

This study, grounded in trade promotion and channel management theory, provides several key findings. First, sales contest does not significantly affect distributor marketing performance or sales volume, indicating that short-term competitive programs are not effective in motivating distributors. Second, promotion policy significantly improves distributor marketing performance but does not directly increase sales volume, suggesting that its effectiveness depends on distributor execution, as emphasized in channel performance theory. Third, distributor salesperson incentives have a significant positive effect on both distributor marketing performance and sales volume, supporting motivation theory which highlights the role of incentives in driving performance. Fourth, distributor marketing performance significantly increases sales volume, confirming its strategic role as a bridge between marketing strategies and sales outcomes. Furthermore, mediation analysis shows that promotion policy affects sales volume only through distributor marketing performance (full mediation), while salesperson incentives influence sales both directly and indirectly (partial mediation). In contrast, sales contest remains ineffective even through the mediating pathway. Overall, the findings emphasize that incentive-based strategies and effective distributor performance are key drivers of sales success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Companies are advised to prioritize performance-based incentive systems, as they have the strongest impact on distributor performance and sales outcomes. In line with motivation theory, incentives should be transparent, measurable, and aligned with sales targets. Promotion policies should be strengthened through better execution at the distributor level, including clearer communication, market adaptation, and the use of digital support, consistent with channel management principles. Meanwhile, sales contest programs need to be redesigned with more attractive and relevant mechanisms or reconsidered as a strategic priority. Additionally, companies should provide continuous training to enhance distributor capabilities in marketing execution. Future research is recommended to include variables such as relationship quality, trust, and digital enablement to better explain distributor performance and sales outcomes.

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