

SMART

Journal of Business Management Studies

(A Professional, Refereed, International and Indexed Journal)

Vol-20 Number-2

July - December 2024

Rs. 500

ISSN 0973-1598 (Print)

ISSN 2321-2012 (Online)

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Founder - Publisher and Chief Editor



**SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT AND ADVANCED RESEARCH TRUST
(SMART)**

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI (INDIA)

www.smartjournalbms.org

**PECULIARITIES OF MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS ON SUPPORT OF
SMALLHOLDERS BY BRANCHED RETAIL CHAINS
(ON THE EXAMPLE OF “SILPO” FOZZY GROUP)**

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Abstract

The relevance of the stated subject of this scientific research was determined by the need to develop and practically implement effective marketing communications, that may ensure on-time deliveries of farm products to supermarkets of modern retail chains and their subsequent implementation, with complete satisfaction of the actual consumer needs. The major objective of this scientific research was to study the main features of building marketing communications, to support small farms by branched retail chains, using the “Silpo” Fozzy Group supermarkets chain as an example. The basis of the methodological approach to this scientific research was the principles of building marketing communications of the “Silpo” supermarket chain Fozzy Group, taking into consideration the materials of a number of researches, aimed at studying the features of building marketing communications in branched retail chains at all levels of their functioning. In this scientific research, the results proved the existing expertise of effective implementation in the studied branched trade network of proven methods for building marketing communications with smallholders, which makes the expertise very promising from the point of view of its application to other retail chains.

Keywords: *Agricultural Supply, Supermarket, Farm Products, Consumer, Trade*

JEL Code: *M31 and L81*

Paper Received : 22.01.2024

Revised : 26.03.2024

Accepted : 13.05.2024

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1. Introduction

Economic development in modern conditions is an illustration of the effective functioning of enterprises in the service markets of any country. In this context, the essential aspect of modern economic development is efficient and timely introduction of marketing technologies in the trade field, as a warranty of maintaining the quality of trade operations at the proper level. The current transformation of existing marketing principles highlights the communicative marketing component as a creative characteristic of activity of any trading enterprise (Marchenko & Luzhnova, 2014; Szostak, 2022). The most effective way of levelling the consequences of transitioning to a fundamentally new level of economic development is precisely a creative approach to modern socio-economic processes. The orderly creation of marketing activity of an enterprise management systems, based upon the application of marketing programs, along with an increasing efficiency of the sales policy, is one of the key areas for ensuring the stability and sustainability of modern retail enterprise activities (Krasilnikov & Kuzmenkova, 2015; Gahramanova, 2019). The organisation of marketing research in the field of studying the functioning principles of the distribution of manufactured products of agricultural companies, based upon marketing programs, have been studied in numerous scientific papers. This kind of scientific research is essential from the point of view of forming a holistic understanding of the role of marketing communications, in supporting small farms with branched retail chains.

Currently, the “Silpo” supermarkets chain is the leader in the Fozzy Group (2022) sales system. There are 239 supermarkets of the chain, in 61 cities of Ukraine, which necessitates the maintenance of marketing communications

in proper condition, ensuring the in-time delivery of products from smallholders to all supermarkets of the chain. At the same time, the effective construction of communications to support smallholders, adopted in the considered system of supermarkets, provides the possibility of planning the activities of these farms, in the context of building a systematic supply chain of farm products to the supermarkets. This determines the importance of the declared topic of scientific research and the need for its comprehensive study in order to form a holistic view of the genuine issues of building marketing communications to support farms as well as to find options for their practical solution.

2. Literature Review

In a developed modern government, building full trade relations involves constructing marketing communications between various parts of the trading system, including agricultural producers. Nowadays, retail trade is a rapidly developing economic sector, the annual growth rate of which is from 15 to 25% (Marchenko, 2012). Rapid globalization, product similarity, and consumer demand, necessitate effective communication strategies between manufacturers, sellers, and consumers in the marketing chain. Modern retail chains serve as a crucial link between production and consumption, ensuring high-quality goods and meeting consumer needs (Marchenko, 2011; Kopicova et al., 2022). As consumer demands for individualized offers increase, large-scale marketing methods lose relevance. In this case, retailers need to provide not only convenient product purchasing but also assurance that the offerings meet customer needs (Cavicchi & Santini, 2018). As a rule, in retail trade, there is dominance of the classical form of selling goods, offline trade, better known as retail trade, through stationary marketplaces. Marketing, as a set of activities, functions as a

qualitative basis for decision-making by a business entity, as well as a way to organise them **(Khuluev, 2018; Loxha, 2019)**.

Network retail trade in many modern European countries is rapidly developing, and in some regions, it has already reached the stage of maturity. At the same time, dozens of new retail chains appear on the market. Constant competition is forcing large retail chains to look for better methods to increase resilience in an ever-changing market environment **(Yi, 2017)**. Food supermarket chains are introducing new formats of activities, aimed at attracting new market segments. Marketing communication, in goods circulation, involves conducting marketing analysis to rate the efficiency of the acquisition and sale of goods processes **(Ghost et al., 2022)**. Effective sales and purchasing strategies are crucial in trading businesses to understand the effectiveness of marketing communications, as they are part of a single commercial structure **(Gahramanova, 2023)**.

Building effective marketing communications practically involves the consideration of the interests of all links in the marketing chain **(Young & Milton, 2021)**. Issues at any stage can impact marketing communication's effectiveness, potentially causing system instability. To prevent this, it is necessary to identify specific tasks, practical solutions, and deadlines for resolving them at all stages. Effective marketing communications between farms and retail trade chains, foster farm development and encourage the production of new agricultural products for sale through the chain's branches. In this context, ensuring the quality control of farm products is essential, with emphasis on the need to meet consumer needs in terms of quality and output **(Evenson & Pingali, 2019)**.

The competition level in the retail industry has a significant impact upon changes in the functioning of marketing communications. Competition, among retail chains, influences communication policy changes and the creation of new offers, that benefit both consumers and manufacturers **(Chikoye et al., 2017)**. Integrated communications are very important in this context, since their implementation enhances the synergistic effect on specific consumer groups. Retail sales are made promptly to consumers, with final profit being influenced by demand and competition in the area **(Droege, 2022; Čižo et al., 2022)**. The marketing component, which takes into account the time of production of finished products and the speed of delivery for sale, is of secondary importance.

The term "customer experience" enables objective description of the essence of the modern market relations processes. The concept of forming and describing real consumer experiences is a well-established approach, that connects various research areas in marketing communications **(Doppler & Steffen, 2020)**. Marketing communications, supporting smallholders, are tailored to farm needs, production capabilities, and the development of agricultural labor markets, their role in food production, and distribution **(Taylor & Charlton, 2018)**.

Building an effective marketing strategy, contributes to consolidating changes introduced into retail chain activities, through an integrated approach, ensuring all activity levels of marketing chain elements **(Leakey, 2017)**. This approach provides a clear understanding of the marketing tasks, that face all elements of the marketing communications chain as well as possible options for their practical solution. Modern farms produce high-quality food products, utilizing marketing communications with retail

chains, to effectively address supply issues and establish communication networks between farms and direct product sales points (Alfen, 2014). At the same time, all the conditions for the supply of agricultural products and the procedure for settlements are necessarily stipulated.

The goods circulation field is crucial for a country's economy, with its formation and activities determined by economic characteristics, that clearly demonstrate its trade role. On an average, the trade industry guarantees the state budget, from 50 to 60% of the total tax deductions (Krasnyuk et al., 2017). Aside from that, up to a quarter of the country's working-age population is provided with jobs, including manufacturers of products that are sold to retail chains. The development of retail chains is directly related to the development of the state economy (Ziberi et al., 2022). Modern retail chains develop strategies involving interaction with finished product suppliers, with farms playing a crucial role. Retail trade networks function by defining supply conditions and mutual settlement procedures (Paul et al., 2016).

Companies' competitiveness, in emerging markets, depends on adapting to external environments and building effective marketing communications. Proper marketing communications ensure successful activities and interaction with business partners. Marketing policies aim to maintain customer loyalty, based on enterprise development strategies (Barrett & Just, 2022; Sylejmani et al., 2019). The marketing policy's vision serves as a foundation for modern marketing relations, focusing on building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with product manufacturers and users.

Relationship marketing involves building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with product manufacturers and final users

(Muimba-Kankolongo, 2018). Effective marketing communications are crucial for achieving profit and fulfilling partnership obligations, ensuring proper communication and task resolution for all marketing chain participants. Marketing communications are primarily defined as methods used to communicate information about goods and services to the intended audience (Kultysheva & Tsykina, 2016). Marketing communications focus on conveying specific information about products and services to consumers, convincing them of the need to purchase them. They manage buyer interest and gradually bring them to make a purchase.

3. Statement of the Problem

The necessity to create and realistically implement efficient marketing communications, that may guarantee agricultural products are delivered on time to supermarkets of contemporary retail chains and they are then sold while completely meeting the wants of actual customers, was the stated challenge of this study. To ensure that agricultural products are delivered from producers to consumers smoothly, smallholder farms, major retail chains, and end users must establish excellent marketing connections.

4. Need of the Study

The necessity to create and practically implement efficient marketing communications, that could guarantee farm products are delivered on time to supermarkets of contemporary retail chains and that their subsequent implementation fully satisfies the needs of actual consumers, determines the relevance of the stated subject. Building complete trade relations, in a developed modern economy, requires the development of marketing communications between many trading system participants, including agricultural producers. Effective communication strategies

between individual links in the marketing chain, such as product manufacturers, sellers, and final consumers, are necessary, given the retail trade sector's rapid growth, the degree of consumer demand, and the high degree of product similarity across manufacturers. In the retail trade sector, well-established marketing communications help to balance supply and demand, which, in turn, helps to meet the primary objective of serving the different requirements of people.

5. Objective of the Study

The major objective of this scientific research was to study the main features of building marketing communications, to support small farms by branched retail chains, using the "Silpo" Fozzy Group supermarkets chain as an example.

6. Hypotheses of the Study

H1: The "Silpo" supermarket chain has implemented effective marketing communication strategies to support smallholder farms in their supply chain.

H2: The grocery chain's sales of agricultural products rise as a result of "Silpo" and smallholder farms' well-established marketing communications.

H3: Strategies like quality control measures, advertising support, discount coupons, and flexible payment systems, contribute to the success of marketing communications with smallholder farms.

H4: The expertise of the "Silpo" chain in building marketing communications with small holders, can be replicated by other retail chains, to improve their support for small-scale agricultural producers.

7. Research Methodology

7.1. Sample Selection

The basis of the methodological approach in this research was the principles of building

marketing communications of the "Silpo" model for developing a program for effective marketing interaction between enterprises of this network and farms that supply products to supermarkets of the chain. The "Silpo" chain, one of the biggest food supermarket chains in Ukraine, has 239 stores spread across 61 cities. Hence it makes an excellent case study for analysing how marketing communication strategies are put into practice, to help small farms to supply their retail stores with agricultural products. In order to accomplish the goals of the study, a purposeful sample selection was used, with the research concentrating on examining the values and procedures that the "Silpo" chain followed in order to build successful marketing contacts with smallholder agricultural suppliers.

7.2. Period of the Study

The data were collected for three months, from June to August 2023.

7.3. Sources of Data

The study's primary source of data, for examining marketing messages and support for smallholder farmers, was the Fozzy Group, one of the top retail chains in Ukraine, and its "Silpo" grocery chain.

7.4. Tools used in the Study

The theoretical basis of this scientific research work consisted of the results of scientific developments of a number of researchers, devoted to the issues of building effective marketing communications in retail chains, including marketing communications between producers of agricultural products as well as their end consumers, including sale points of products. The theoretical experience thus gained was applied in order to conduct an objective scientific research of marketing communications, to support small farms, with extensive retail chains.

The key principles of building marketing for “Silpo” **Fozzy Group (2022)**, which were examined for this study, were the availability of a unique range of farm products, a wide variety of original products and development of a local network of agricultural production. To reflect on these principles, a schematic method was used, to display the relationship between marketing communications of the “Silpo” supermarket chain by Fozzy Group, and product suppliers, especially farmers. Also, aspects of supporting farms were considered separately. This support is expressed in the construction of effective communication structures, aimed at solving certain issues of organising farm activities, in order to meet the needs of supermarket visitors. The research schematically presents the marketing communications of the network “Silpo” Fozzy Group with farms, including a detailed consideration of building marketing communications in each individual case.

The research examined in detail the major features of building marketing communications to support smallholders, adopted in the “Silpo” supermarket chain by Fozzy Group (2022). Data on the number of currently functioning supermarkets of the chain, as well as the approximate number of products sold, were applied as materials that objectively reflect the sequence of building the research. In order to rate the effectiveness of the marketing communications usage in this scientific research, the method of statistical comparison of annual profit from food products sales in the largest supermarket chains of Ukraine, was applied. Based upon the results obtained, the conclusion was formulated regarding the effectiveness of marketing communications to support smallholders of the “Silpo” supermarket chain Fozzy Group. On the basis of the results obtained in this research, the final conclusion was made, summing up the entire complex of the scientific

research work performed. Thereafter, the results obtained in this scientific research, as well as the conclusion, may be used as an effective methodological basis for studying the principles of building effective marketing communications, to support smallholders by large, branched retail chains.

8. Data Analysis and Interpretation

“Silpo” is one of the leading food supermarket chains in Ukraine. These self-service supermarkets “Silpo” have up to 20,000 products, with predominance of food products, the share of which is 80% of the total. The product range also includes related goods. Farm products make up a significant share of food products, which, in itself, determines the importance of research in the development of marketing communications between supermarket chains and farms. The average floor area of a supermarket is $1440m^2$. **Figure-1** shows a scheme of the construction of marketing communications in the “Silpo” network, in relation to various areas of activity.

In the context of building marketing communications with suppliers of final products, support for farms by the “Silpo” supermarket chain Fozzy Group (2022), consisted of the following aspects:

- formation of regular shipment plans of farm products to departments of the supermarket chain;
- setting requirements for the current quality standards of farm products to be sent to the chain’s supermarkets;
- planning to expand the range of supplies of farm products;
- regulating the prices with the formation of an offer beneficial to both parties;
- testing the issues of optimizing deliveries with the replacement of low-quality or expired products.

Marketing communications to support farms, which are actively implemented today by the departments of the “Silpo” supermarket chain Fozzy Group (2022), ensure regular supplies of basic food products like milk and dairy products, meat and meat products, eggs, cereals, sugar, sunflower and olive oil, etc. The marketing communication, built between a supermarket chain, producers of agricultural products and their end consumers, is to consistently inform the target consumers about upcoming promotions, special offers and discounts. **Figure-2** shows the major features of building marketing communications to support smallholders, adopted in the “Silpo” supermarket chain by Fozzy Group.

The implementation of a prepaid system for certain types of products, supplied by farms to the “Silpo” Fozzy Group (2022) retail chain, stimulates the maintenance of agricultural production at the proper level and contributes to its systematic increase. Specific types of products, that go under the prepaid system by the branches of the chain, are determined on the basis of individual agreements with suppliers. The encouragement of farm products sales is carried out through the introduction of various marketing techniques, that increase the initial value of agricultural products for a given time and stimulate consumer activity. With regard to the sale of agricultural products in the “Silpo” supermarket chain, this is expressed in the introduction of test samples of goods and free tastings of certain types of products (cheeses, sausages, dairy products). Thus, the consumer gradually forms a positive image of the manufacturer of agricultural products and confidence in the quality of the product. Subsequently, this has the most favourable effect on the growth of final sales volume and the formation of a cyclical supply of products.

Advertising support for manufacturers’ goods is carried out through the media dissemination, television, the internet, radio and print media, covering new types of products of agricultural producers, as well as existing systems of discounts for these types of products. For this purpose, the “Silpo” supermarket chain Fozzy Group (2022) actively uses advertising in transport, particularly in the subway. Thus, the potential buyer is informed about the range of agricultural products offered, established prices, and the competitive advantages of certain goods. In addition, through advertising in a place, a potential buyer often receives information about the very manufacturer, which contributes to the recognition in the future and raises the image of the manufacturer. Internal coupons of the “Silpo” supermarket chain Fozzy Group determine the policy of providing shares for certain types of agricultural products, at various time frames. Thus, the likelihood of making a purchase of goods from agricultural producers, increases and the growth of demand for agricultural products gets stimulated in general. Further, there is a widespread policy of providing discount coupons for certain types of agricultural products for holidays, which also stimulates the consumer to purchase certain food products.

Stimulating the growth of agricultural production is carried out by creating favourable supply conditions, as well as building clear communication with manufacturers, which implies informing about current sales volume, and the dynamics of their changes. This allows farms that produce certain types of agricultural products, to improve the quality of planning for its production and gradually increase production volume, based upon the genuine needs of the consumer and knowledge of trends in sales dynamics. All the listed types of marketing communications have a favourable effect, both

on the activities of farms that supply their products to supermarkets of the “Silpo” chain, and on sales volume of products in the chain. **Table-1** presents data on the annual volume of sales of products of the leading grocery supermarkets in Ukraine, as on 01/01/2022.

As seen from the data presented in **Table-1**, the “Silpo” retail supermarket chain is the leader in product sales among competing supermarket chains in Ukraine at present. This state of affairs was achieved largely due to well-organised marketing communication on supporting farms, which are the most important suppliers of agricultural products to the departments of the supermarket chain. Thus, the concept of supporting farms integrated with branched trading chains, turns into the development of the chains themselves and the increase in the volume of profits they receive. This is confirmed by the data on the profit received by the “Silpo” supermarket chain **Fozzy Group (2022)**, as well as its growth indicators. A distinguishing feature of building marketing communications between the departments of the “Silpo” supermarket chain Fozzy Group and small farms, is the constant quality control of the supplied products, combined with competent advertising support for agricultural producers. The supermarket chain “Silpo” actively distributes advertising of manufacturers and their products, with the obligatory focus on the high quality of products and the availability of appropriate certificates confirming it. Such measures strengthen the confidence of potential buyers in the offered goods and contribute to an increase in sales. Therefore, marketing communications towards support of smallholders, implemented in the Fozzy Group “Silpo” food supermarket chain, have proved their practical effectiveness and may be recommended to other branched retail chains, that distribute a wide range of agricultural products.

9. Findings of the Study

The research findings unequivocally show how the “Silpo” supermarket chain successfully implemented tried-and-true marketing communication tactics, to promote smallholder farmers, that supply agricultural products to its stores. “Silpo” has been able to build solid partnerships with small farm suppliers thanks to specific activities like encouraging farm product marketing, advertising support, internal discount coupons, production volume incentives, quality control methods, and flexible advance payment systems. While satisfying customer requests, this all-encompassing approach to marketing communications, has made it easier to supply fresh farm goods on time. In comparison to other large Ukrainian grocery chains, “Silpo” recorded a substantial 25% sales growth in 2021, which supports the profitability and competitiveness earned through their farmer-supportive marketing techniques. Overall, the findings demonstrate “Silpo’s” proficiency in utilising marketing communications, to successfully incorporate smallholders into their supply chain, which translates into higher agricultural sales and expansion for the supermarket chain as well as the farming community it serves.

10. Suggestions

The study’s conclusion advises retail chains to strengthen their support for smallholder farms, with insightful recommendations. Retail chains may build closer ties with small-scale farmers, by implementing comparable marketing communication tactics, such as advertising campaigns, discount programmes, quality control procedures, and adjustable payment plans. This can support the expansion and improvement of the agricultural community while making it easier to obtain fresh farm products in a more dependable and effective manner. The report also emphasises how crucial it is to have open

lines of communication and align incentives in order to guarantee benefits for smallholder suppliers as well as the retail chain.

11. Conclusion

Scientific research of the peculiarities of building marketing communications, to support small farms by branched retail chains, after the model of the “Silpo” supermarket chain of the Fozzy Group, has led to the following conclusion. The “Silpo” supermarket chain of Fozzy Group successfully operates a marketing communications system, to support farms acting as suppliers of agricultural products to the branches of the chain. Marketing communications to support small farms have been effectively developed, stimulating the marketing of farm products, implementing advertising support for agricultural products, introducing internal coupons for certain types of agricultural products into circulation by a supermarket chain, stimulating volume increase of goods production by agricultural producers, introducing measures to establish a procedure for quality control of products of smallholders, as well as a flexible system of advance payments for certain types of farm products. The scheme for supporting agricultural producers, represented by farms, has clearly proved its efficiency. Since the beginning of 2022, the “Silpo” supermarket chain has been occupying a leading position, among all food supermarket chains in Ukraine. At the same time, the products of smallholders, represented by basic food products (milk and dairy products, meat and meat products, cereals, sugar, flour, fruits and vegetables) form the basis of the proposed consumer product range.

Thus, throughout this scientific research, the significant importance of well-built marketing communications of an extensive food supermarkets chain to support smallholders, both for the farms themselves and for the departments

of the supermarket chain, has been proved. Practically, there is the possibility of building cyclic, uninterrupted supplies of agricultural products to the chain branches, as well as planning the load of agricultural producers, in the medium and long term. The principles of building marketing communications to support small farms by branched retail chains, implemented by the “Silpo” supermarket chain of the Fozzy Group, can be effectively used by other retail chains, interested in increasing profits and stimulating agricultural manufacturers.

12. Limitations of the Study

Although the study offers a thorough examination of the marketing materials for the “Silpo” grocery chain, its scope was restricted to one particular retail company that operates in Ukraine. The tactics and efforts, that have been mentioned, may not be appropriate or practical in other nations or areas that have distinct regulatory regimes, market dynamics, or cultural contexts. Further, while the study primarily focuses on the retail chain’s perspective, more research that takes into account the perspectives and experiences of smallholder farmers themselves, may be able to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with developing successful marketing communications.

13. Scope for further Study

The foundation for future research, on the function of marketing communications to incorporate smallholder farmers into contemporary retail supply chains, has been opened by this study. Subsequent investigations may explore more thoroughly the particular mechanisms and optimal approaches for cultivating enduring, mutually advantageous associations between merchants and small-scale producers. Further, comparison analyses,

conducted across several retail chains or geographical areas, may offer insightful information about the various strategies and their relative efficacy. Additionally, it could be beneficial to look into how marketing messages affected fair trade, sustainable farming methods, and the general economic growth of rural communities. It will be more and more important to comprehend the dynamics of marketing communications as the demand for sustainably produced and locally sourced food items, grows.

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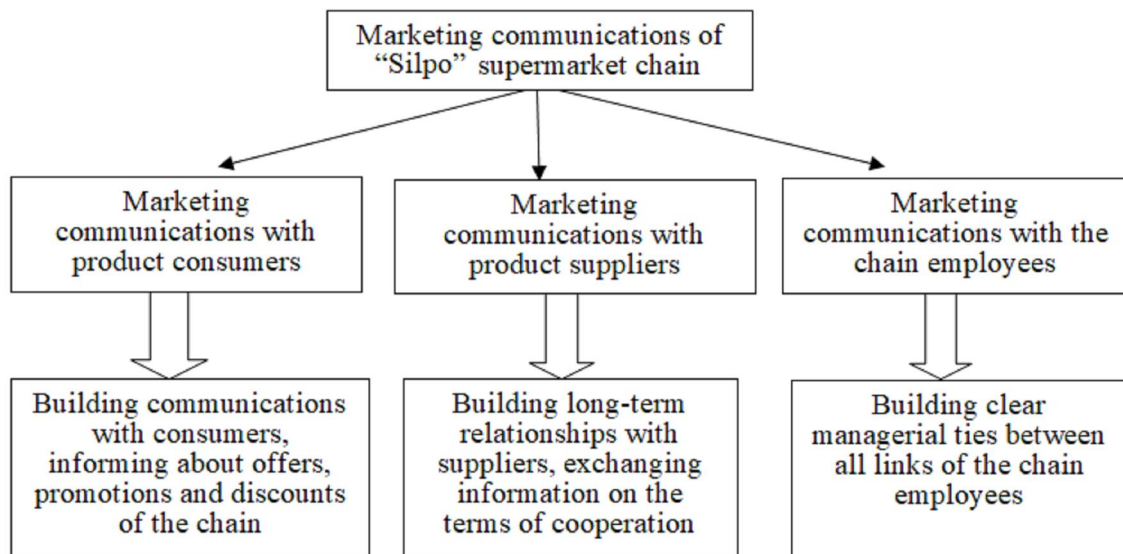
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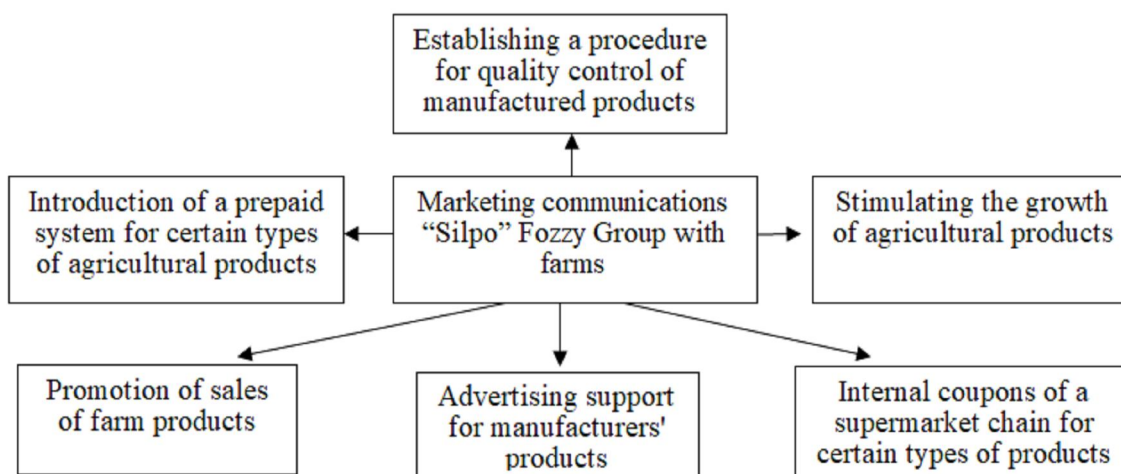
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Figure – 1: Marketing Communications in “Silpo” Supermarket Chain Fozzy Group



Source: Primary Data & Author’s Calculation

Figure - 2: Marketing Communications of “Silpo” Fozzy Group to Support Farms



Source: Primary Data & Author’s Calculation

Table-1: Volume of Annual Products Sales of the Leading Food Supermarkets

No.	Name	Revenue for 2021, mln. UAH	Growth compared to 2020, %
1	“Silpo” Fozzy Group	18850	25
2	ATB	15354	17
3	Auchan	8220	-8
4	Furshet	6748	2
5	Eco-market	5675	12

Source: Primary Data & Author’s Calculation