



Customer Satisfaction Towards Export Services: An Empirical Study of a Tamil Nadu-Based Agricultural Export Firm

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Abstract

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Customer satisfaction is a decisive factor in the competitiveness of agricultural export firms, where product perishability, documentation accuracy and delivery reliability jointly shape buyer trust. This study examines customer satisfaction with the export services of the Company, a Tamil Nadu-based exporter of vegetables, shallots, fruits and flowers, with particular reference to overseas buyers in Qatar and other Middle Eastern markets. A descriptive, cross-sectional research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 31 respondents comprising importers, distributors, wholesalers and retailers through a structured questionnaire covering twenty service attributes rated on a five-point Likert scale, supplemented by behavioural and open-ended items. The overall mean satisfaction score across all twenty attributes was 3.75 out of 5.00, and 90.3 per cent of respondents rated the company's services as good or excellent. Freshness and quality retention of produce during export (mean 4.10; 87.1 per cent positive) and overall service satisfaction (mean 4.03; 83.9 per cent positive) emerged as the strongest attributes, followed by packaging (mean 3.94) and pricing (mean 3.87). In contrast, responsiveness to customer queries (mean 3.65; only 48.4 per cent positive), meeting quality expectations (mean 3.52) and consistency in order quantity and specifications (mean 3.58) were identified as relative weaknesses. The dimension-level analysis showed that packaging, pricing and product quality perform above the overall mean, whereas competitiveness and documentation communication labeling perform below it. The study

concludes that while the Company enjoys a favorable reputation for product freshness and reliability, targeted improvement in customer communication, responsiveness and order-specification accuracy could strengthen buyer loyalty and repeat business.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction; Agricultural exports; Export service quality; Packaging and logistics; Buyer loyalty; Documentation accuracy; Perishable-goods trade.

1. Introduction

India's agricultural export sector has grown steadily as improved farming practices, cold-chain infrastructure, digital trade platforms and supportive government policy have enabled exporters to move perishable produce to international markets without significant loss of quality. Rising global demand for fresh, healthy and increasingly organic food has positioned India as a significant supplier of fruits, vegetables, spices and flowers, while also generating employment across farming, processing, packaging, transportation and allied services. Within this environment, small and medium



exporters compete not only on price but on product quality, delivery reliability, documentation accuracy and responsiveness to buyers.

The Company, based in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, exports mixed vegetables, shallots, fruits and flowers, with an established buyer base in the Middle East, particularly Qatar. As a firm handling perishable consignments, its competitiveness depends heavily on the consistency of its export services: a delay in logistics, a packaging defect or an incomplete export document can lead to consignment rejection, financial loss and reputational damage. Although the company has built relationships with overseas buyers, it had not, prior to this study, systematically collected and analyzed customer feedback on service quality. This paper reports the findings of a structured customer satisfaction survey undertaken to close that gap and to convert dissertation stage research into a format suitable for academic publication.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the overall level of customer satisfaction with the export services provided by the Company.
- To identify the relative importance of product quality, packaging, delivery reliability, documentation accuracy and price in determining customer satisfaction.
- To analyse the relationship between timely delivery of consignments and the intention of buyers to place repeat orders.
- To study the impact of after-sales support and complaint-handling procedures on customer loyalty.
- To compare satisfaction levels across different product categories such as fresh vegetables, fruits, shallots and flowers.

3. Conceptual Framework and Review of Literature

Customer satisfaction in agricultural export services can be conceptualised as a function of product-related attributes (quality, freshness, consistency), process-related attributes (delivery reliability, documentation accuracy, packaging) and relational attributes (communication, complaint handling, trust). Recent literature situates the present study within this broader framework.

On product and process quality, Verma and Chauhan (2025) found that ventilated crates with moisture-absorbing liners reduced transit spoilage in shallot and onion exports by nearly a quarter compared with conventional jute packaging, while Al-Mutairi and Ahmed (2025), surveying Qatar-based importers of Indian produce, reported that product quality and delivery reliability were the top two satisfaction drivers, with price ranking only fourth. Menon and Krishnan (2026) showed that continuous cold-chain temperature monitoring increased buyer confidence and order frequency, and Reddy and Prasad (2024) linked farm-to-fork traceability systems to a clear preference among quality-conscious importers.

On relational and communication factors, Gupta and Banerjee (2024) found that proactive transit updates and complaint responses within forty-eight hours produced markedly higher loyalty scores among Middle Eastern vegetable importers, while Siddiqui and Ali (2026) observed that clear, prompt written communication improved perceived service quality across the cultural distance separating Indian exporters from Gulf buyers. Sato and Tanaka (2024) demonstrated that immediate replacement or credit, accompanied by a clear explanation of the cause of damage, restored buyer trust more effectively than delayed compensation.

On pricing, documentation and competitiveness, Ibrahim and Khan (2024) found that transparent pricing and forward contracts helped exporters sustain relationships through currency volatility, and Bhatia and Kapoor (2025) linked structured export-documentation training to a measurable reduction in commercial disputes. Fernandez and Lopez (2024) reported that consistent quality together with on-time arrival explained the majority of variance in buyer loyalty in the global flower trade, and Hassan and Omar (2026) found that organic or Global GAP certification was associated with higher order values among Gulf buyers.



Collectively, this literature indicates that while product quality and freshness remain foundational, buyer satisfaction and loyalty in agricultural exports increasingly depend on responsiveness, transparent communication and documentation accuracy dimensions that this study specifically examines for the Company.

4. Research Methodology

A descriptive, cross-sectional research design combining quantitative and qualitative elements was adopted. Primary data were collected from 31 respondents drawn from overseas buyers importers, distributors, wholesalers and retailers who had received consignments from the Company. Given the small, well-defined buyer population, a purposive sampling frame (firms with documented transaction history) was combined with convenience sampling for response collection. A structured questionnaire, pre-tested with five industry contacts, gathered respondent-profile data, twenty five-point Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) covering product quality, packaging, delivery, documentation, communication and pricing, behavioural-intention items (repeat purchase, recommendation, overall rating) and open-ended qualitative questions. Data were collected primarily through an online questionnaire with telephone follow-up for non-respondents, and were supplemented by secondary data from the company's packing lists, commercial invoices and published industry reports for contextual triangulation.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Of the 31 respondents, 67.7 per cent were male and 32.3 per cent female; 41.9 per cent were aged 25–35 years. Retailers formed the largest customer category (38.7 per cent), followed by wholesalers (32.3 per cent), distributors (16.1 per cent) and importers (12.9 per cent). Regarding relationship duration, 41.9 per cent had worked with the company for one to three years and 35.5 per cent for less than a year, while order frequency was evenly split between monthly and weekly buyers (45.2 per cent each). On the overall service-rating item, 48.4 per cent of respondents rated services as "Good" and 41.9 per cent as "Excellent", with only 9.7 per cent rating them "Fair"; no respondent selected "Poor".

Across the twenty service-attribute items, the overall mean score was 3.75 out of 5.00. Table 1 summarises the highest- and lowest-scoring attributes.

Service Attribute	Mean (/5.00)	Positive Response (%)
Freshness and quality maintained throughout export (Q16)	4.10	87.1
Overall satisfaction with export services (Q12)	4.03	83.9
Packaging of products is satisfactory (Q6)	3.94	77.4
Orders delivered on time (Q2)	3.87	74.2
Pricing of export services is reasonable (Q10)	3.87	67.7
Overall mean across 20 attributes	3.75	—
Company provides quick responses to queries (Q4)	3.65	48.4
Consistent order quantity and specifications (Q18)	3.58	51.6
Communication is clear and professional (Q5)	3.58	54.8
Quality of exported products meets expectations (Q1)	3.52	58.1

At the dimension level, packaging (3.94), pricing (3.87) and product quality and freshness (3.81) scored above the overall mean, while competitiveness (3.65) and documentation, communication and labelling (3.68) scored below it. This pattern suggests that the Company's core operational strengths keeping produce fresh, packaging it well and pricing it competitively are not yet matched by an equally strong customer-facing communication experience. The gap



is most visible in Q4 (quick responses to queries), where the positive-response rate of 48.4 per cent was the lowest of all twenty items, indicating that nearly half of respondents did not feel adequately served in this respect even though they were broadly satisfied with the product itself.

Because the data were collected at a single point in time, a genuine time-series trend could not be established; however, the attribute-level pattern (ranging from 3.52 to 4.10) shows that operational and product-handling attributes consistently outperform customer-response and differentiation attributes, a pattern consistent with the relational-factors literature reviewed above (Gupta & Banerjee, 2024; Siddiqui & Ali, 2026).

6. Findings and Suggestions

Findings:

- Overall customer satisfaction with the Company's export services is favourable: the aggregate mean across twenty attributes is 3.75/5.00, and 90.3 per cent of respondents rated services as good or excellent.
- Freshness and quality retention during export (Q16) is the strongest attribute (mean 4.10; 87.1% positive), followed by overall satisfaction (Q12, 4.03) and packaging (Q6, 3.94).
- Responsiveness to customer queries (Q4) is the weakest attribute, with only 48.4 per cent positive response despite a moderate mean of 3.65, indicating a segment of buyers who feel under-served on communication turnaround.
- Meeting quality expectations (Q1, 3.52), communication clarity (Q5, 3.58) and consistency of order quantity/specifications (Q18, 3.58) are the next weakest attributes.
- At the dimension level, packaging and pricing exceed the overall mean, while competitiveness and documentation-communication-labelling fall below it, showing an imbalance between operational strength and customer-facing service.
- The buyer base is relatively frequent (90.4% order monthly or weekly) but not yet long-tenured (77.4% have dealt with the company for three years or less), suggesting satisfaction gains made now could translate into stronger long-term loyalty.

Suggestions:

- Introduce a defined query-response turnaround standard (for example, acknowledgement within 24 hours and resolution within 48 hours) to directly address the low positive-response rate on Q4.
- Standardise proactive shipment communication — periodic transit updates and advance notice of any delay — to raise scores on communication clarity (Q5) and documentation/communication/labelling as a dimension.
- Strengthen pre-shipment quality-control checks against buyer specifications to close the gap on meeting quality expectations (Q1) and order-specification accuracy (Q18).
- Continue and publicise existing cold-chain and packaging practices, since freshness retention (Q16) and packaging (Q6) are validated strengths that can be used for competitive differentiation.
- Pursue visible quality certifications (for example, Global GAP or organic certification) to improve the comparatively weak competitiveness perception relative to other exporters.
- Institute a short structured feedback mechanism after each shipment so that future satisfaction data can be tracked over time and genuine trends, rather than a single cross-sectional snapshot, can inform management decisions.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to assess customer satisfaction with the export services of the Company and to identify the service dimensions most strongly associated with buyer satisfaction and loyalty. The evidence from 31 overseas buyers indicates an overall favourable satisfaction level, anchored in the company's demonstrated ability to preserve product



freshness, package consignments well and price its services competitively. At the same time, the analysis identifies a consistent and specific gap between these operational strengths and the company's customer-facing communication particularly responsiveness to queries, clarity of communication and consistency of order specifications. Addressing this gap through defined response-time standards, proactive communication and tighter pre-shipment verification is likely to convert the company's existing product-level goodwill into stronger repeat business and referrals. Given the cross-sectional design and the relatively small, non-probability sample drawn from a single exporter, the findings should be read as diagnostic for the Company rather than generalisable to the wider Indian agricultural export sector; future research with a larger, longitudinal sample across multiple exporters would help confirm and extend these results.

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