

Cargo experience with metaphors: A perceptual evaluation of cargo companies

Metaforlarla kargo deneyimi: Kargo şirketlerine yönelik algısal bir değerlendirme

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Abstract

The rapid growth of e-commerce has increased the importance of cargo services in shaping customer experiences and satisfaction. This study aims to explore consumers' perceptions of cargo companies through metaphor analysis. A qualitative research design was employed, and data were collected through metaphor-based structured interviews with 65 consumers residing in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey. The data were analysed using Content Analysis. The findings indicate that consumers generally hold positive perceptions of cargo companies, particularly regarding delivery speed, reliability, and operational efficiency. However, concerns related to customer communication and service consistency were also identified. The metaphorical expressions revealed both functional and emotional dimensions of cargo experiences, providing a deeper understanding of how consumers evaluate cargo services beyond conventional satisfaction measures. The study contributes to the literature by extending metaphor analysis to the context of cargo services. It offers practical implications for improving service quality, customer communication, and brand perception in cargo companies.

Keywords: Perceived Quality, Service Experience, Customer Satisfaction, Cargo, Metaphor

Jel Codes: L81, L87, M31, L91

Öz

E-ticaretin hızla büyümesi, müşteri deneyimlerinin ve memnuniyetinin şekillenmesinde kargo hizmetlerinin önemini artırmıştır. Bu çalışma, tüketicilerin kargo şirketlerine yönelik algılarını Metafor Analizi aracılığıyla incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada nitel araştırma deseni benimsenmiş, veriler Kahramanmaraş ilinde yaşayan 65 tüketiciden metafor temelli yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler İçerik Analizi yöntemiyle değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, tüketicilerin kargo şirketlerine yönelik genel olarak olumlu algılara sahip olduğunu, özellikle teslimat hızı, güvenilirlik ve operasyonel etkinlik unsurlarını ön plana çıkardıklarını göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, müşteri iletişimi ve hizmet tutarlılığına ilişkin bazı sorun alanları da belirlenmiştir. Metaforik ifadeler, kargo deneyimlerinin hem işlevsel hem de duygusal boyutlarını ortaya koyarak, tüketicilerin kargo hizmetlerini geleneksel memnuniyet ölçütlerinin ötesinde nasıl değerlendirdiklerine ilişkin daha derin bir anlayış sunmuştur. Çalışma, metafor analizinin kargo hizmetleri bağlamında uygulanmasına katkı sağlayarak literatüre destek olmaktadır. Ayrıca kargo şirketlerinin hizmet kalitesini, müşteri iletişimini ve marka algısını geliştirmelerine yönelik uygulamaya dönük çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algılanan Kalite, Hizmet Deneyimi, Müşteri Memnuniyeti, Kargo, Metafor

JEL Kodları: L81, L87, M31, L91

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Introduction

The rapid increase in digitalisation across every field has transformed customer experiences, pushing them to seek excellence. Logistics is one of the sectors rapidly developing under the influence of digitalisation. Logistics serves as a key enabler of economic activity across sectors. According to Gökmoğol (2021), logistics is the effective and efficient planning, organisation, execution, and control of the flow of products, services, and information from the point of raw material to the point of consumption to meet customer needs. Logistics is a chain that involves not only industrial customers but also final consumers. The most visible part of logistics and the one that directly connects with the consumer is cargo services.

Cargo companies are responsible for delivering shipments from senders to recipients promptly while managing logistics activities, including handling, warehousing, transfer, and transportation. Cargo generally refers to packaged goods transported from one location to another through organised delivery networks. As a key component of last-mile delivery, cargo services represent the most visible interface between logistics operations and consumers, directly influencing customer satisfaction.

With the increase in digitalisation, e-commerce has rapidly gained a larger share. Parallel to e-commerce, cargo services have also increased. Internet accessibility, mobile technology, and digital innovations are changing consumers' lifestyles and habits. Companies have recognised that their presence on the internet and social media affects the growth of store sales, shaping the origins of e-commerce retail (Indap, 2019). According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK, 2024), "The proportion of individuals using the Internet who purchased or ordered goods or services over the Internet for private use (e-commerce) was 49.5% in 2023 and 51.7% in 2024." Furthermore, "The compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of the general e-commerce volume reached 85.66% between 2019 and 2024, and the CAGR of the retail e-commerce volume reached 90.82% in the same period" (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade, 2025). Among sectors that received the largest share of e-commerce growth, the transportation sector ranks among the top three (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Trade, 2025). At this juncture, logistics for consumers now primarily brings to mind the cargo delivery processes in which they are most involved. Therefore, the importance of identifying and making sense of consumers' perceptions of their cargo experiences becomes evident.

A gap arises between the service a customer expects (perhaps based on past experiences, word of mouth, or promises made by the company) and the service the customer perceives (Mario, 2006). A customer who chooses to send a package through a cargo company forms expectations (often subconsciously) about the service they are likely to encounter. These expectations include criteria such as the courtesy of the receiving or delivering personnel, the security of the cargo during transport, on-time delivery, a damage-free arrival of the package, tracking the delivery, and continuous updates on the cargo's status. Expectations can be based on advertisements for the cargo company, word of mouth from others who have used the company, or the customer's past experiences with the firm. During service delivery, the customer will experience or perceive the service as expected or as different from expectations (better or worse). In this case, the customer gap refers to the perceived difference (Mario, 2006). This perceived difference constitutes the starting point of this study.

This study aims to evaluate consumer perceptions of cargo companies using metaphors. Metaphors provide a valuable means of exploring not only customer satisfaction but also the emotions, meanings, and perceptions underlying service experiences. By enabling individuals to express thoughts and feelings that may be difficult to articulate directly, metaphor analysis offers deeper insights into consumers' evaluations of cargo services. Although previous studies have examined cargo services in terms of service quality, customer satisfaction, and consumer preferences, research exploring consumers' cargo experiences through metaphors remains limited. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the literature by revealing the metaphorical perceptions consumers associate with cargo companies and by providing insights that may support service improvement, customer relationship management, and brand development.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do consumers perceive cargo companies through metaphors based on their service experiences? (2) What positive and negative themes emerge from consumers' metaphorical descriptions of cargo companies? (3) What do these metaphorical perceptions reveal about customer satisfaction, service quality, reliability, and communication practices in cargo services? The answers to these questions provide a deeper understanding of consumers' cargo experiences and contribute to the literature on service experience and customer perceptions in cargo services.

Literature review

Metaphors are an integral part of our conceptual system, enabling the understanding of complex ideas through simpler, more concrete domains (Volodymyrivna, 2024). The use of metaphors often occurs at a subconscious level, where individuals employ figurative language to convey their thoughts creatively and understandably (Abduboriyevna, 2019). Although a metaphor is often viewed as a literary device or a distinguishing feature of figurative language, adopting a conceptual perspective enables it to enter the research process (Dexter & LaMagdeleine, 2002). When metaphors are combined with lived, critical, and imaginary events, they help generate new service ideas. Customer experiences can be used to interpret unspoken, implicit knowledge. This is beneficial when companies seek to learn and create something new together with the customer (Helkkula & Pihlström, 2010).

According to Kotler (1998; Temel, 2024), products related to consumer experiences have three fundamental dimensions. The first dimension concerns the magnitude of the "core product", which addresses the query about what the consumer fundamentally receives. The second dimension covers aspects such as the tangible product it represents, its functional features, intrinsic qualities, overall quality, design elements, brand characteristics, and packaging considerations. The third dimension, the augmented product dimension, encompasses additional components such as logistics, delivery mechanisms, installation procedures, and after-purchase service offerings (Temel, 2024). National and international sources related to the topic have been reviewed. Below are some studies in the literature concerning cargo experiences.

Several studies have examined consumers' experiences and perceptions of cargo services from different perspectives. Deniz & Gödekmerdan (2011) found that consumers generally evaluated staff behaviour and cargo-handling processes positively, although delivery delays remained a common source of dissatisfaction. Similarly, Ünal & Yücel (2014) emphasised the importance of service quality and customer satisfaction in influencing consumer preferences, while Çakmaklı & Özkan (2017) reported that consumers attached particular importance to complete, secure, and accurate delivery. More recently, Çoban & Aksezer (2023) demonstrated that consumers evaluate cargo companies based on price, reliability, speed, staff behaviour, and service network characteristics. Likewise, Temel (2024) highlighted the critical role of cargo services in shaping online shopping experiences.

Another stream of research has focused on organisational and stakeholder perspectives. Deste & Savaşkan (2020), Alnıpak & Ceyhan (2023), and Yiğit & Çakırkaya (2024) examined the experiences of corporate customers and emphasised the influence of service quality, relationship management, and communication practices on customer evaluations. In addition, Gerou, Patsiouras & Pantouvakis (2025) demonstrated the significant relationship between stakeholder experiences and stakeholder satisfaction in the cargo transportation sector.

Studies conducted in the air cargo sector have similarly concentrated on service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and performance evaluation. Jiang (2023) identified challenges in customer satisfaction and loyalty, while Li (2023) developed a service quality evaluation framework for air cargo services and identified several service quality deficiencies. Comparable findings were reported by Wang (2023), Yang (2023), and Zhao (2023), all of whom emphasised the importance of improving service quality and customer experience in air cargo operations.

Taken together, the existing body of research demonstrates that consumers evaluate cargo services through multiple dimensions, including delivery performance, reliability, communication quality, and service effectiveness. The findings also indicate that customer experiences are shaped not only by operational outcomes but also by interactions throughout the service process. However, the literature has predominantly emphasised measurable and functional aspects of cargo services, providing limited insight into how consumers interpret and assign meaning to their experiences.

While these studies provide valuable insights into the functional aspects of cargo services, they offer a limited understanding of how consumers cognitively and emotionally interpret their cargo experiences. As a result, the emotional and symbolic dimensions of cargo experiences remain relatively underexplored. Metaphors enable individuals to express perceptions, emotions, and meanings that may not be captured through conventional evaluation methods. Despite the growing importance of cargo services in consumers' daily lives, no study was identified that examines consumer perceptions of cargo companies through metaphor analysis. This gap is important because understanding the symbolic meanings and perceptions associated with cargo experiences may provide deeper insights into customer expectations, service evaluations, and brand perceptions. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring consumers' metaphorical representations of cargo companies.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to evaluate participants' perceptions of cargo companies through metaphors based on their experiences with these companies. With the publication of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, the term "conceptual metaphor" entered linguistic usage. It began to be understood as the process of comprehending one concept or conceptual domain through another. According to Lakoff, the essence of metaphor is understanding one thing in terms of another. A large part of our conceptual system is structured metaphorically, meaning that most concepts can be understood in part through other concepts (Volodymyrivna, 2024). Based on this perspective, the present study aims to reveal perceptions toward cargo companies through metaphors.

In this study, ethical approval for conducting the research was obtained from the Kahramanmaraş İstiklal University Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee with decision number 2024/15-06 dated 30.12.2024. The data were collected in the province of Kahramanmaraş. During data collection, surveyors provided support. When selecting the surveyors, their scientific data-collection skills were considered, and preference was given to at least graduate-level students (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

The data were collected between January 10 and February 3 in 2025. The obtained data were analysed using content analysis, a qualitative data analysis method. The data were collected face-to-face through a structured interview method (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). A convenience sampling method was used in the study (Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, it is recommended to ask 5-10 questions. To examine the topic in detail, 10 questions were asked of participants during the research process. These questions were posed based on the cargo companies participants had most recently worked with, and clarifications were provided accordingly. These questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Questions Included in the Interview Form

Question	References
1. If you were to describe this cargo company with a metaphor, how would you define it?	Firdaus & Sutarso, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021.
2. If the service provided by the cargo company were personified as a character, how would it behave?	Fajardo et al., 2023; Keni & Esmeralda, 2022.
3. If you were to describe this company's service as a means of transportation, which vehicle would you choose and why?	Altuntaş et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2021.
4. If you thought of the delivery process as a journey, what kind of route would it be?	Baştuğ et al., 2020; Patchou et al., 2021.
5. If you were to match this company's delivery speed with an animal, which animal would it be? Why?	Uzir et al., 2021.
6. When you think of the employees of this cargo company as a team, which team sport or profession would you associate them with?	Firdaus & Sutarso, 2022.
7. How would you describe the customer service provided by the cargo employees using a character metaphor?	Firdaus & Sutarso, 2022.
8. If you were to describe the company's reliability using a type of structure, what kind of structure would it be?	Yang et al., 2021.
9. If you were to express your communication with the cargo company through a metaphor, what kind of communication would it be?	Wang et al., 2021.
10. If you were to express the company's overall image or impression with a colour or weather condition, what would it be?	Fauziah et al., 2020.

Participants were selected from individuals aged 18 or older who had previously used cargo services. Areas with high population density within the city were preferred for data collection. Data were collected from 65 participants. Although qualitative studies often employ relatively small sample sizes, a sample of approximately 15 participants may be considered sufficient in certain contexts (Morse, 1995; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The adequacy of a qualitative sample is primarily determined by data saturation. In the present study, data collection continued until no substantially new metaphors, codes, or themes emerged from participants' responses. Given the repeated observation of similar patterns and

metaphorical expressions, it was concluded that thematic saturation had been achieved. Therefore, the final sample of 65 participants was considered sufficient to address the research objectives.

During the analysis phase of the study, the researcher first read and organised all documents and conducted preliminary preparation for themes and codes. Then, all data were entered into a computer program commonly used in qualitative analysis, and themes and codes were linked through the software (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Additionally, similar codes and themes that emerged were associated and simplified, making the findings more meaningful (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

The coding and theme development process used qualitative content analysis. First, all participant responses were reviewed repeatedly, and the metaphors generated for each question were identified. During this stage, the explanations accompanying the metaphors were examined to determine the meanings participants attributed to their metaphorical expressions.

In the second stage, similar metaphorical expressions were grouped according to their underlying meanings and assigned initial codes. For example, metaphors such as "jet," "high-speed train," and "sports car" were coded under concepts related to speed and efficiency. In contrast, metaphors such as "flat tyre," "taxi with a broken GPS," and "road construction" were coded under concepts associated with delays, uncertainty, or operational problems. The coding process focused not only on the metaphor itself but also on the participant's explanation for choosing it.

In the third stage, codes with similar characteristics were grouped into categories. Subsequently, related categories were combined into broader themes representing common patterns in participants' perceptions of cargo companies. For instance, categories emphasising speed, efficiency, and reliability were grouped under positive service-related themes. In contrast, categories emphasising delays, communication problems, uncertainty, and operational deficiencies were grouped under negative service-related themes.

Finally, the resulting themes were reviewed and refined through repeated comparisons with the original participant statements to ensure that they accurately reflected the meanings expressed by the participants. Throughout the analysis process, consistency between the raw data, codes, categories, and themes was maintained to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

Findings

When the demographic findings related to the participants in the study were examined, it was found that the majority were women (64.62%), single (60.00%), had an undergraduate level of education (58.46%), were between the ages of 18-24 (52.32%), were students (40.00%), had an income level below 30,000 TRY (49.23%), and generally used cargo services within the scope of e-commerce (64.62%). In addition, participants reported receiving cargo deliveries 2-3 times (41.54%) in the past month.

Table 2: Demographic Distribution of the Participants

Gender	n	%	Marital Status	n	%
Female	42	64.62	Single	39	60.00
Male	23	35.38	Married	26	40.00
Total	65	100	Total	65	100
Education Level	n	%	Age	n	%
High school or below	3	4.62	18-24	34	52.31
Associate degree	15	23.08	25-31	15	23.08
Bachelor's degree	38	58.46	32-38	9	13.85
Graduate degree	9	13.85	39+	7	10.77
Total	65	100	Total	65	100
Occupation	n	%	Income	n	%
Student	26	40.00	1-30.000	32	49.23
Private sector	3	4.62	30.001-50.000	13	20.00
Public sector	18	27.69	50.001-70.000	9	13.85
Homemaker	11	16.92	70.001+	11	16.92
Self-employed/Other	7	10.77	Total	65	100
Total	65	100	Cargo Usage	n	%
Number of cargo deliveries received in the last month?	n	%	E-commerce	42	64.62
1 time	18	27.69	Personal	17	26.15
2-3 times	27	41.54	Work-related	6	9.23
4-5 times	14	21.54	Total	65	100
6 or more	5	7.69			
Total	65	100			

Within the scope of the study, participants were first asked the question: "If you were to describe this cargo company with a metaphor, how would you define it?", referring to the most recent cargo company they used or experienced. Based on the findings, participants generally had positive feelings toward the cargo companies (56.92%).

In this study, 3 themes and 15 codes were identified. Under the theme "Positive Perception and Satisfaction," 5 codes emerged. Among these codes, "a fast and solution-oriented friend" had the highest frequency. For example, in response to the question, Participant 1 (Female, 22 years old, university student) commented: "If I were to describe this cargo company using a metaphor, I would call it a fast and solution-oriented friend. When I ordered something online, I was able to easily track my package and receive it on time. Even when a minor problem occurred, customer service responded promptly and helped resolve the issue." Another participant (Male, 29 years old, public sector employee) provided the following response to the same question: "For me, this cargo company is like a fast supporter who gets the job done without creating unnecessary problems. The delivery process was smooth, the courier was helpful, and communication was clear throughout the entire process."

Under the theme "Disappointment and Dissatisfaction," 6 codes were identified. The final theme, which included undecided participants, was defined as "Ambivalent Evaluations." The prominence of the code "a sailor delivering in a turbulent sea" under this theme indicates that, although participants experienced indecision, their overall positive feelings remained dominant. It also suggests that they perceived the cargo companies they encountered as ultimately fulfilling their purpose by successfully delivering the packages.

Table 3: Cargo Company Metaphors

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
Positive Perception and Satisfaction	A fast and solution-oriented friend	12	37	32.43	56.92
	An efficient servant	9		24.32	
	A knowledgeable professional	7		18.92	
	A dutiful person	5		13.51	
	A trustworthy friend	4		10.81	
Disappointment and Dissatisfaction	Turtle	7	17	18.92	26.15
	A balloon drifting in the wind	4		10.81	
	Someone full of surprises but not trustworthy	2		5.41	
	A journey in foggy weather	2		5.41	
	A ship without a compass	1		2.70	
	A patched bundle	1		2.70	
Ambivalent Evaluations	A sailor delivering in a turbulent sea	5	11	13.51	16.92
	A worker is trying to fix their mistake	3		8.11	
	A fast taxi driver	2		5.41	
	Someone unpredictable	1		2.70	
Total		65		100	
Theme: These are overarching concepts formed from categories. Code: These are meaningful segments and events present within the data. fi: Frequency value for the related code. Σfi: Total frequency of all themes and codes. %: Weight of the related code within the theme. Σ%: Percentage weight of the theme within the overall total. Note 1: The same abbreviations have been used consistently across all other tables in the study.					

In the next stage of the research process, participants were asked to describe cargo companies as a character. When responses to this question were examined, participants emphasised the importance of timing and adherence to the promised delivery period, highlighting the code "punctual and disciplined".

When the participants' responses were examined, 2 themes and 14 codes emerged. As shown in Table 4, the theme "Positive Behaviour and Professionalism" (69.23%) was dominant, indicating that participants' positive perceptions of cargo companies continued within this context.

In the study, participants were asked the question: "If you were to describe this company's service as a means of transportation, which vehicle would you choose and why?" As a result of the content analysis, 2 themes and 11 codes emerged. Under the theme "Speed and Modern Vehicles," 6 codes were identified. For example, regarding the "High-speed train" code, which had the highest frequency, one participant stated: "I would especially compare my most recent cargo delivery to a high-speed train because everything progressed much faster than I expected. I placed my order, and before I even had time to wonder where it was, it had already arrived. The entire process was very well organised. This speed and consistency reminded me of a high-speed train that always runs on time." In contrast, regarding the "Flat tyre" code, which had the lowest frequency, another participant commented: "I would compare the shipping company to a flat tyre. Initially, everything was going smoothly, but the delivery kept being delayed, and I couldn't get clear information about what was happening. It finally arrived, but it took a very long time, and I wasted my time waiting unnecessarily." An examination of these codes shows that the concept of speed was particularly emphasised.

Table 5: Transportation Vehicle Metaphors for Cargo Companies

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
Fast and Modern Vehicles	High-speed train	16	46	34.78	70.77
	Jet	11		23.91	
	Airplane	8		17.39	
	Speedboat	6		13.04	
	Sports car	3		6.52	
	Drone	2		4.35	
Insufficiency and Slowness	Taxi with broken GPS	6	19	31.58	29.23
	Freight train	5		26.32	
	Worn-out minibus	3		15.79	
	Bicycle with a slipped chain	2		10.53	
	Car slipping on ice	2		10.53	
	Flat tire	1		5.26	
Total		65			100

In this study, the fourth question posed to participants was: "If you think of the delivery process as a journey, what would the route of this journey be like?" As shown in Table 6, 4 themes and 15 codes emerged. The theme "Trust and a Happy Ending" had the highest frequency weight (56.92%), while "Routine Procedures" had the lowest (7.69%). Among the codes, "a wait that ends happily" had the highest weight (32.43%).

Table 6: Findings on Associating the Delivery Process with a Journey

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
Trust and a Happy Ending	A waiting period that ends happily	12	37	32.43	56.92
	An arrow reaching its target	7		18.92	
	A journey completed despite minor setbacks	5		13.51	
	A smooth route	6		16.22	
	A road that requires patience	4		10.81	
	Like riding a roller coaster	3		8.11	
Uncertainty and Obstacles	Ongoing road construction	4	8	50.00	12.31
	A long and uncertain tunnel	2		25.00	
	A road prone to accidents	1		12.50	
	A bus trip coinciding with a holiday rush	1		12.50	
Stress and Impatience	Traffic congestion	7	15	87.50	23.08
	Constant red lights	5		62.50	
	A slow-moving convoy	3		37.50	
Routine Procedures	A familiar, ordinary route	3	5	60.00	7.69
	Transportation is taking approximately the expected duration	2		40.00	
Total		65			100

When participants were asked to associate the delivery speed offered by cargo companies with an animal, the results obtained are presented in Table 7. An examination of Table 7 shows that 4 themes and 15 codes emerged. It is noteworthy that when the themes of "fast and reliable" (63.08%) and "fast

but unreliable" (9.23%) are combined (a combined weight of 72.31%), participants predominantly emphasised the speed factor.

Table 7: Association of Cargo Delivery Speed with Animal Metaphors

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
Fast and Reliable	Bee	13	38	31.71	63.08
	Ant	9		24.39	
	Cheetah	5		12.20	
	Greyhound	5		12.20	
	Horse	5		12.20	
	Falcon	2		4.88	
	Eagle	1		2.44	
Fast but Unreliable	Fox	5	6	83.33	9.23
	Jackal	1		16.67	
Slowness and Delay	Turtle	5	16	31.25	24.62
	Snail	4		25	
	drowsy sloth	4		25	
	Lazy cat	3		18.75	
Uncertainty and Irregularity	Lost pigeon	1	2	50.00	3,08
	Dog chasing its tail	1		50,00	
Total		65			100

In this study, participants were asked to associate cargo company employees with a team sport or a profession. An analysis of the responses revealed 2 themes and 15 codes. The theme "Systematic and Highly Duty-Oriented" had the highest weight, with the codes "Professional dance team" (21.95%) and "Synchronised swimming team" (21.95%) emerging as the most frequent. Based on the identified codes, it can be concluded that participants are generally satisfied with the functioning of cargo companies.

Table 8: Associating Cargo Company Employees with a Team Sport or Profession

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
High Systematic Work and Strong Sense of Duty	Professional dance team	9	41	21.95	63.08
	Synchronised swimming team	9		21.95	
	Military ceremony unit	8		19.51	
	Well-organised volleyball team	6		14.63	
	Shift-working logistics team	4		9.76	
	Expert medical team	3		7.32	
	Automatically operating assembly line	2		4.88	
Lack of Coordination	A student who completes the group project alone	5	24	20.83	36.92
	Amateur theatre group	4		16.67	
	Team of new interns	4		16.67	
	Unplanned picnic group	3		12.50	
	An apprentice who doesn't know the job	3		12.50	
	Students waiting for the recess bell	2		8.33	
	A cook who dislikes their job	2		8.33	
	Neighbourhood soccer match	1		4.17	
Total		65			100

In the study, participants were asked: "How would you describe the customer service provided to you by the cargo company employees as a character?" The findings related to the responses given to this question are presented in Table 9. A total of 4 themes and 17 codes emerged. When the table is examined, it is observed that the negative experiences participants had with customer representatives were expressed through the themes "Insensitivity and Lack of Understanding" (24.62%), "Communication Difficulties and Lack of Trust" (20.00%), and "Insufficient Assistance and Lack of Solutions" (7.69%), and these three themes cumulatively constituted the largest share (52.31%). In this respect, participants' experiences with cargo companies' customer representatives were generally negative.

Table 9: Description of Customer Services

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
Insensitivity and Lack of Understanding	Indifferent officer	7	16	43.75	24.62
	Robotic customer representative	6		37.5	
	Someone who nods but doesn't listen	3		18.75	
Communication Difficulties and Lack of Trust	Sullen security guard	4	13	30.77	20.00
	A doorman who doesn't help	3		23.08	
	Broken record	3		23.08	
	A tourist guide who has lost their way	2		15.38	
	The neighbour who opens the door halfway	1		7.69	
Insufficient Help and Lack of Solutions	A shopkeeper who brushes you off	2	5	40.00	7.69
	Someone who creates problems instead of solving them	2		40.00	
	Inexperienced rookie who doesn't know what they're doing	1		20.00	
Attentive and Helpful Approach	A knowledgeable professional	9	31	29.03	47.69
	Patient and explanatory representative	7		22.58	
	Friendly and supportive guide	6		19.35	
	Polite and courteous communicator	4		12.90	
	Customer service that is detailed yet clear	3		9.68	
	Friendly and understanding employee	2		6.45	
Total		65			100

Another question posed within the scope of the research was: "If you were to describe the reliability of this company as a type of structure, what kind of structure would it be?" When examining participants' perceptions of cargo companies' reliability, the code "steel-construction house" (26.83%) stands out as the most positive theme. These findings highlight that the traces of the recent earthquake disaster in the region remain and continue to influence individuals' perceptions. One of the participants' evaluations regarding this finding is as follows: "After experiencing the earthquake, I pay much more attention to whether a building feels safe or not. For the same reason, I would compare this cargo company to a steel-frame house. Even when there are small delays or unexpected issues, I still trust that my package will arrive safely."

Table 10: Perceived Organisational Structure of Cargo Companies

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
Structures Conveying Reliability	Steel-frame house	11	41	26.83	63.08
	A solid fortress	8		19.51	
	Reinforced-concrete apartment building	7		17.07	
	Earthquake-resistant housing complex	7		14.63	
	A solid bridge	6		12.20	
	Well-maintained public building	3		7.32	
	Skyscraper	1		2.44	
Fragility and Unreliability	Paper castle	5	14	35.71	21.54
	Building with cracked beams	4		28.57	
	Cracked building	2		14.29	
	Dilapidated shack	2		14.29	
	Hollow yet ostentatious palace	1		7.14	
Disorder and Neglect	Partially constructed building	2	4	50.00	6.15
	Abandoned factory	1		25.00	
	Skeleton house	1		25.00	
Loss of Trust and Disappointment	Building without structural inspection	2	6	33.33	9.23
	Seemingly earthquake-resistant building with foundational issues	2		33.33	
	Inaccessible temple	1		16.67	
	Bridge on the verge of collapse	1		16.67	
Total		65			100

This study explored the communication patterns between consumers and cargo company employees by asking, "If you were to describe your communication with the cargo company using a metaphor, what would it be like?" The findings yielded 2 themes and 18 codes. The theme "Obstacles and Conflict" stood out, accounting for 69.23% of responses. Within this theme, the code "Talking to the Wall" had the highest frequency (22.22%).

Table 11: Communication Practices of Cargo Companies

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
Communication that can be established but is Challenging	A representative who answers after effort but speaks briefly	6	20	30.00	30.77
	Delayed but explanatory feedback	4		20.00	
	A call centre that eventually produces results	3		15.00	
	A system that responds later	3		15.00	
	Support is accessible only during limited hours	2		10.00	
	An employee who is attentive but provides unclear answers	2		10.00	
Barriers and Miscommunication	Talking to a wall	9	45	22.22	69.23
	Getting stuck with automated responses	7		15.56	
	Feeling like your message is only "seen"	5		11.11	
	A game of broken telephone	4		8.89	
	A deaf-mute dialogue	4		8.89	
	A difficult job interview	3		6.67	
	Judicial process	3		6.67	
	Walking uphill	3		6.67	
	Echoing cave	2		4.44	
	Like a courthouse corridor	2		4.44	
	Missed call	1		2.22	
	An unsolvable riddle	1		2.22	
Total		65			100

As a final component of the study, participants were asked to describe the overall image or impression of cargo companies using a colour or a weather condition. Upon examining the responses, two themes and seventeen codes emerged. It can be inferred that a sense of satisfaction predominantly shapes participants' perceptions. In this regard, the theme "Moderate and Trust-Inducing" stands out with 64.62%, indicating that it is the most prominent perception among respondents.

Table 12: Image of Cargo Companies

Theme	Code	fi	Σfi	%	Σ%
Warm and Trustworthy	A warm spring weather	8	42	12.31	64.62
	A bright day	7		10.77	
	A sunny morning	6		9.23	
	A lightly breezy summer evening	5		7.69	
	A partly cloudy yet hopeful sky	5		7.69	
	A pink rose	4		6.15	
	The wind of Maraş	4		6.15	
	Fog fading in daylight	2		3.08	
	A relaxing Spotify playlist	1		1.54	
Uncertainty and Variability	A grey and foggy day	5	23	7.69	35.38
	Stormy sea	4		6.15	
	Rainy weather	3		4.62	
	Cloudy weather	3		4.62	
	Twilight	3		4.62	
	Brown and muddy	2		3.08	
	Faded colors	2		3.08	
	Dried flower	1		1.54	
Total		65			100

When the codes under the theme "Uncertainty and Change," which can be considered negative, are examined, it becomes evident that a generally mild atmosphere still prevails. This indicates that participants' perceptions of cargo companies are, overall, rather moderate. Based on participants' responses within the scope of the study, a total of 29 themes and 157 codes were identified.

Discussion and conclusion

In modern commerce, the cargo (delivery) experience is a critical factor that directly influences business success and customer satisfaction. The cargo experience forms the foundation of customer satisfaction, and each experience constitutes an important step in shaping the next one. Technological developments and evolving customer expectations require customer experiences to be examined more comprehensively. This study aimed to evaluate customers' experiences with cargo and their satisfaction with metaphors. Through metaphorical expressions, it sought to reveal customers' perceptions of cargo companies. In line with this purpose, content analysis, a qualitative research method, was employed.

In this study, most participants used cargo services for e-commerce and reported generally positive perceptions of cargo companies. Participants associated cargo companies with reassuring metaphors such as "a fast and solution-oriented friend" and "a knowledgeable professional." At the same time, the speed of service was linked to rapid and technologically driven images such as "high-speed train," "jet," "bee," and "cheetah." Employees were perceived as systematic and disciplined, represented by metaphors like "a professional dance team" and "a synchronised swimming team." In contrast, the corporate structure was viewed as reliable, exemplified by the metaphor of a "steel-construction house." The dominance of the theme "a wait that ends happily" in the delivery process indicates that, despite occasional disruptions, participants perceive the service as ultimately being completed successfully. The prominence of metaphors such as "high-speed train," "jet," and "sports car" suggests that delivery speed constitutes a central component of consumers' evaluations of cargo companies. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasising the importance of delivery speed and operational performance in shaping customer satisfaction and service quality perceptions (Deniz & Gödekmerdan, 2011; Çakmaklı & Özkan, 2017; Temel, 2024).

However, alongside these positive perceptions, several critical problem areas were also identified. Some participants described cargo companies using metaphors that evoke a sense of unreliability, such as "a turtle" or "a ship without a compass"-while customer service was characterised as "an insensitive clerk"

or "a robot-like customer representative." Communication processes were depicted as one-sided and obstructed, with expressions such as "talking to a wall" and "getting stuck with automated responses." These findings indicate that although cargo companies generally inspire confidence, inconsistencies in individual service experiences persist, and there is a significant need for improvement, particularly in customer communication. Although the overall image is balanced and conveyed through mild metaphors such as "a warm spring day," variability in service quality undermines customer satisfaction.

One of the most striking findings of the study was the emergence of the metaphor "talking to a wall" in relation to customer communication. This metaphor suggests that customers perceive communication channels as ineffective, unresponsive, or unable to provide satisfactory solutions to their problems. Although cargo companies have increasingly adopted automated communication technologies, the findings indicate that customers still value accessible and responsive human interaction, particularly when facing delivery problems or service failures. Therefore, cargo companies should not only invest in technological solutions but also ensure that customers can easily reach competent personnel when necessary. To eliminate perceptions such as "talking to a wall" and "a robot-like customer representative," communication channels should be strengthened, customer service personnel should receive targeted training, and a more effective live support line should be developed. The gap between the metaphors "a competent professional" and "an indifferent employee" points to a lack of standardisation. To ensure consistent quality standards across all branches, detailed procedural guidelines should be prepared, regular audits conducted, and a performance-based reward system established.

The widespread use of metaphors such as "high-speed train" indicates that delivery speed is a core component of customer perceptions. Cargo companies should therefore communicate delivery performance more effectively through tracking systems, proactive notifications, and service guarantees to maintain this positive image. Reliability-related metaphors such as "steel-frame house" suggest that customers value package security and trust. Cargo companies may strengthen these perceptions by clearly communicating package protection procedures, insurance options, damage prevention practices, and delivery assurance policies.

Scientific studies on perceived service quality, service experience, and customer satisfaction generally support the findings of the present research. Ren, Qiu, Wang & Lin (2016) reported that four factors of customer experience-tangibles, personnel aspects, aesthetic perception, and location-have a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction. Pandey & Chawla (2018) found that dimensions of customer experience influence loyalty either directly or indirectly through satisfaction. Nobar & Rostamzadeh (2018) demonstrated that expectations significantly affect satisfaction, and that both satisfaction and expectations are positively related to loyalty. Wang, Wang, Xue, Wang & Li (2018) indicated that price and popularity exert strong moderating effects on the relationship between satisfaction and customer experience, whereas Zaid & Patwayati (2021) found that customer experience has a strong, positive effect on both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Unlike previous studies that have predominantly focused on measurable service attributes such as delivery speed, reliability, and customer satisfaction, the present study provides insight into the symbolic and emotional meanings consumers associate with cargo services. Metaphor analysis revealed dimensions of customer experience that may be hidden when conventional survey-based approaches are employed.

The primary limitation of this study is that the data were collected exclusively from consumers residing in Kahramanmaraş. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised; however, meaningful insights can still be drawn. Future studies may examine metaphorical perceptions of cargo services across different regions or countries and compare the findings. Mixed-method studies combining qualitative and quantitative approaches may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of cargo experiences. Furthermore, the metaphors identified in this study may serve as the basis for developing quantitative scales to measure consumer perceptions of cargo companies.

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