

EFFECTIVENESS OF NICHE STRATEGIES UNDER DUMPING CONDITIONS: THE CASE OF FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION

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Abstract. This article analyses the effectiveness of non-mass (niche) strategies in freight transportation, examining their potential as a tool to counter dumping and ensure the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The study aims to evaluate the potential of niche, client-oriented approaches in creating a distinctive value proposition that enables companies to avoid price competition and remain resilient in the face of market conditions. The research employs a comparative analysis of mass and non-mass strategies, as well as an empirical examination of case studies from companies that use specialised logistics models. Key performance indicators such as profitability margin, customer loyalty and operational resilience have been evaluated. The results show that non-mass strategies, such as geographic specialisation, service differentiation, personalised pricing and integration into clients' business processes, provide higher profit margins than mass models, which depend on the scale of operations. The study also demonstrates that operational flexibility enables businesses to adapt to market shocks, such as fluctuations in fuel prices or seasonal variations in demand. A practical analysis of case studies confirms that companies focusing on niche market segments can maintain profitability, even during periods of intense price competition. The research's practical value lies in offering strategic recommendations to small and medium freight operators, with the aim of reducing their dependence on price-based competition and increasing business sustainability. The proposed strategic matrix can be used to select the optimal positioning model according to the scale of operations and level of specialisation. The study's scientific novelty lies in the systematisation of principles for applying non-mass strategies in freight transport under dumping conditions, the development of a strategic positioning matrix that considers scale, specialisation and integration with client processes, and the proof of its effectiveness through real-world case analysis, which highlights the advantages of client-oriented approaches.

Keywords: dumping, freight transportation, non-mass strategies, price competition, logistics specialisation, personalised service, operational resilience.

JEL Classification: L91, L11, D43, L21

1. Introduction

The modern transport and logistics market is undergoing radical transformation, characterised by increased competition, economic volatility, rising production costs and intensified price competition among participants. Against this backdrop, the issue of dumping – a destructive market phenomenon that warps the competitive landscape, destabilises established business practices, and pushes small and medium-sized freight operators to the margins of the market – has become particularly acute. In such circumstances, it is extremely important to search for effective strategic alternatives that can help

transport companies avoid destructive price competition and focus on building stable business models.

2. Analysis of Recent Research and Publications

The phenomenon of dumping within the transport sector is conventionally analysed through the prism of unfair competition and its subsequent price pressure on smaller market entities. According to the research conducted by Browne, McLeod and Woxenius (2024), as well as Pajak et al. (2020), price-based competition is identified as

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one of the most volatile instruments for securing a competitive advantage, failing to generate long-term organisational value. Furthermore, studies by Kohut, Shvets and Sodoma (2025), Sokolov (2025), and Rajasekharan and Dass (2024) demonstrate that standardised mass transportation models exhibit diminished efficiency amidst fragmented demand; consequently, there is a burgeoning requirement for niche logistical interventions. Empirical evidence suggests that small and medium-sized carriers, while unable to compete on an economies-of-scale basis, can maintain market viability by prioritising specialisation, operational flexibility, and seamless integration into their clients' value chains.

Within academic discourse, the issue of dumping in the freight transport sector is predominantly analysed through the lens of regulatory loopholes, as highlighted by Govindan et al. (2024) and Rakyta et al. (2022). It is equally considered alongside the imperative to modernise the strategic management of small logistics enterprises. Furthermore, domestic scholars emphasise the necessity of developing service-oriented models and implementing digital solutions to enhance competitiveness. Consequently, the current body of literature corroborates the critical need to identify viable alternatives to the prevailing challenges of dumping within the transport industry.

3. Identification of Previously Unresolved Parts of the General Problem

Operating transport and logistics enterprises shows that forming effective strategies to combat dumping in freight transportation remains only partially resolved. Most research focuses on classical pricing methods or antitrust mechanisms. However, non-mass (niche) strategies as a tool of competitive advantage have not been studied enough. The problem of integrating non-mass strategies into a comprehensive transport business management system has not received sufficient attention, particularly due to the lack of unified approaches to assessing their economic efficiency, operational sustainability, and impact on long-term customer loyalty. At the same time, the study of algorithms for avoiding the dumping zone of competition through service specialisation, personalised pricing and deep integration into customers' business processes has been almost non-existent.

4. Formulation of the Objectives of the Article (Task Statement)

The purpose of the present article is to provide substantiated evidence for the efficacy of the deployment of non-mass strategies in transport and logistics activities as a countermeasure to dumping practices and manifestations in the freight transportation market.

5. Presentation of the Main Material of the Study

Dumping, in the classical sense, is interpreted as the practice of selling goods or services at a price significantly lower than the cost price, or lower than the market price in other countries or regions. The objective of this practice is to oust competitors from the market, gain or retain market share, as well as create artificial competitive advantages through hard price pressure (Kantsedal, Lega & Morozov, 2025). The freight transport segment, particularly road transport, is acutely susceptible to dumping, primarily due to the minimal barriers to market entry, substantial supply saturation, limited service differentiation, and the pivotal role that customer cost sensitivity plays in selecting suppliers. In this interpretation, the practice of dumping can take several forms, including price dumping, which consists in the setting of tariffs that do not adequately cover costs, based on a short-term increase in transportation volumes; dumping due to excessive use of subcontractors working at the margin of profitability; or dumping due to the lowering of standards (for example, operation of an old fleet, lack of cargo insurance, neglect of drivers' working conditions) (Makedon, 2010). Furthermore, it is imperative to delineate the phenomenon of "institutional dumping", which pertains to the existence of substantial discrepancies in the tax, social and administrative obligations imposed on carriers across various nations. This issue assumes particular significance in the context of cross-border transportation, wherein carriers operating within jurisdictions characterised by lax regulatory frameworks are able to offer services at reduced tariffs without incurring the costs typically associated with operators within countries that adhere to more rigorous standards.

In the context of high-intensity competition and market pressures, non-mass strategies, otherwise termed niche, focus or customer-oriented

approaches, emerge as a pivotal element in a company's strategic positioning. These strategies find particular application in market segments characterised by intense price competition, where conventional cost-reduction models become inaccessible or ineffective for small and medium-sized market participants, particularly within the domain of freight transportation (Ivanov, Nagai & Sokhan, 2025). Mass strategies are distinguished by their emphasis on standardisation, unification of services and targeting of the widest segment of consumers. In contrast, non-mass approaches are characterised by their focus on the specific needs of particular customer groups, geographical regions, types of cargo or logistics models. This approach enables the creation of a unique value proposition without direct conflict with large operators. The main principles of non-mass strategies are:

- Focusing on a narrow segment that has stable demand but is underserved by large operators;
- service differentiation due to added value (speed, reliability, individual approach, flexible schedule, additional services);
- building long-term relationships with customers through personalised service, transparent communication, and after-sales support;

– organisational flexibility, which allows to quickly adapt routes, schedules, and tariff models to changes in market conditions or the requirements of a specific customer.

In the realm of freight transportation, non-mass strategies are employed, manifesting in the form of service specialisation. This can be illustrated by the transportation of goods that necessitate temperature conditions or specific insurance provisions, or the utilisation of mass carriers for small consignments, where their efficacy is diminished. Another example could be geographic specialisation on routes to hard-to-reach or low-competitive regions, where operating costs are higher, but competition becomes lower, which opens up space for the formation of premium tariffs without the threat of dumping pressure. In addition, the models of 'last mile logistics' in urban areas are worth mentioning as an innovative approach. These models provide a personalised service for small businesses or online stores, allowing them to avoid direct competition with large operators who cannot offer the same speed and flexibility (see Table 1).

The implementation of non-mass strategies within the transport sector necessitates a comprehensive transformation of the company's internal organisational structure. This involves

Table 1

Determining the specifics of using non-mass strategies in the field of freight transportation

Type of strategy	Working principle	Basic benefits	Expected limitations	Scope of application
Geographic specialisation	Focus on serving hard-to-reach or low-competitive regions where mass operators are less efficient	Higher tariffs due to low competition, stable demand in specific regions	High operating costs, limited market scale	Transportation to remote rural regions or mountainous areas
Service specialisation	Concentration on transportation of cargo with special requirements (temperature regime, special insurance)	Unique value proposition, customer loyalty	High costs for specialised equipment and personnel training	Transportation of medical products with strict temperature control
Last mile logistics	Personalised service for small businesses and online stores in urban areas	Flexibility, speed of response, integration into the client's business processes	High competition in cities, difficulty in scaling	Delivery of goods from online stores within the city in 2–3 hours
Personalised pricing	Formation of tariffs based on individual client needs with additional services	Higher margins, long-term customer relationships.	The complexity of revenue forecasting, the need for CRM systems	Customised logistics solutions for small businesses with flexible schedules
Integration into client business processes	Providing comprehensive logistics solutions with transparent reporting and control	High customer loyalty, resistance to market fluctuations	High requirements for automation and staff competence	Implementation of real-time cargo tracking systems for customers

Source: based on (Akulyushina & Piterov, 2025; Govindan, et al., 2024)

the establishment of client teams, the integration of CRM systems, the automation of route planning processes, and the engagement of personnel with a high level of service competence. Collectively, these measures serve to establish a substantial barrier to entry for potential competitors in the chosen niche market. In addition, the authors note that companies that implement non-mass strategies in conditions of fierce competition maintain a higher level of margin, better customer loyalty and greater resistance to crisis market fluctuations, in particular during periods of decline in overall demand or increased costs for fuel and fleet maintenance (Fig. 1) (Lipych, 2022).

The employment of non-mass strategies is predicated on a profound comprehension of the intricacies of demand, the capacity to strategically prioritise select segments, and the agility to respond to individual customer requests. This enables the creation of value propositions that are challenging to replicate by large mass operators.

The most effective areas for implementing such strategies in the transport sector are: geographical specialisation, targeting specific customers or types of cargo, personalised pricing with service differentiation, and the integration of logistics solutions into customers' business processes (Kohut, Shvets & Sodoma, 2025).

A significant area of application of non-mass strategies in the field of freight transportation is geographical specialisation and work with local markets. This involves the carrier's activities being concentrated on a limited but strategically advantageous territory, where the level of competition is lower, and the need for a reliable, flexible and fast logistics partner is higher. In such conditions, the company has the opportunity to thoroughly immerse itself in the logistics specifics of the region, form stable customer relationships, optimise routes taking into account local infrastructure, and also offer a unique service adapted to the realities of a particular zone. The

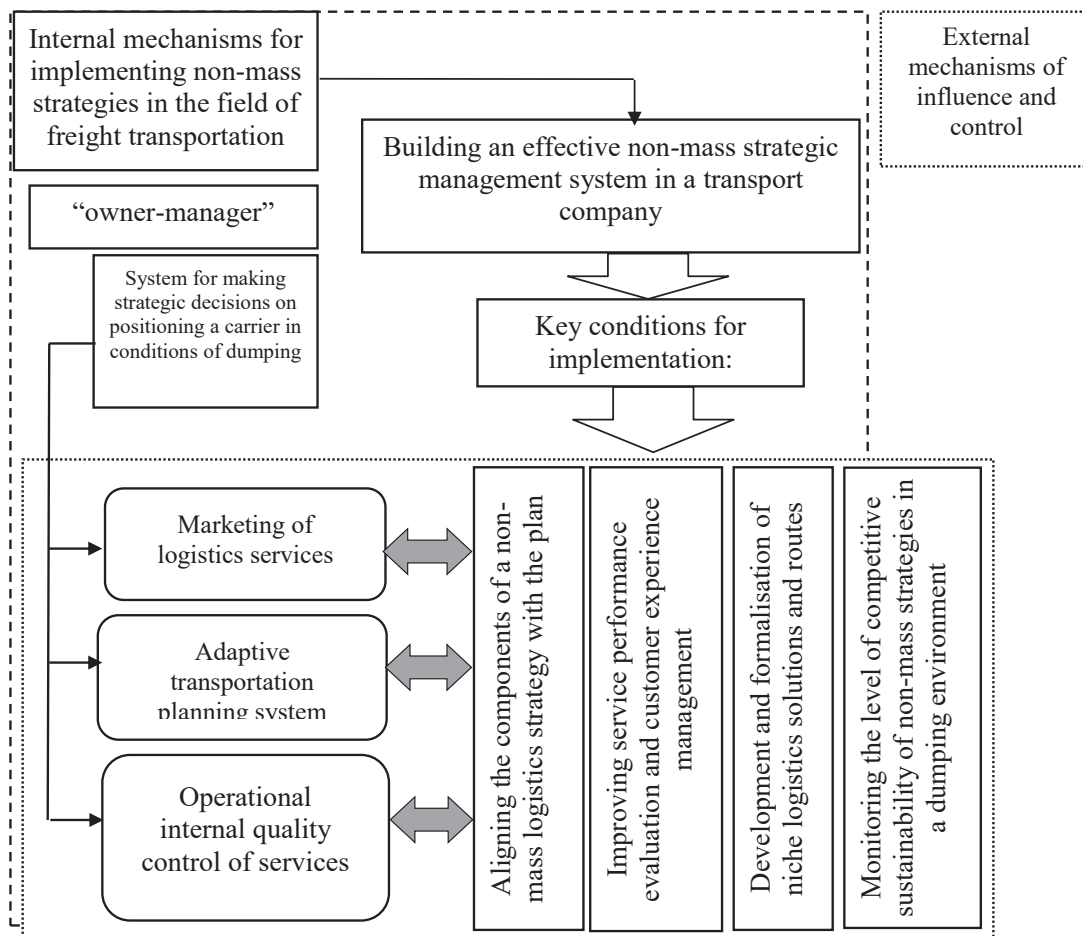


Fig. 1. The process of implementing non-mass strategies of a freight carrier in conditions of dumping competition

Source: generated by the author

strategic focus on geographic specialisation enables the circumvention of competitive engagement with major transport enterprises, which predominantly concentrate on interregional or international transportation, consequently exhibiting suboptimal efficiency at the local level. For instance, a carrier that specialises in delivering goods to mountainous or border areas, where large trucks are limited by infrastructure, can offer the small business segment high-quality logistics services at premium rates. This is because the low volume of transportation can be compensated for by high added value (Lyons & McDonald, 2022).

The second important application of non-mass strategies is targeting specific groups of customers or cargo transportation with special requirements, particularly for dangerous, perishable, valuable or storage-sensitive goods. The cost of error or delay in such cases is extremely high, so customers are willing to pay for a reliable, controlled service that complies with special conditions (Petrukha, Petrukha & Krupelnytska, 2022).

The third implementation strategy is personalised pricing and service differentiation. This allows companies to respond flexibly to the needs of individual customers and to create fairer tariff models that take into account real costs, seasonal demand fluctuations, cargo type and delivery urgency. Personalised pricing is based on in-depth analysis of customer behaviour, order history and priorities in logistics processes, enabling companies to offer each customer a unique tariff package that aligns with their business model. In conjunction with service differentiation, which may encompass cargo insurance, real-time tracking, SMS notifications, route configuration for a designated schedule of acceptance at the customer's warehouse or preliminary processing of documentation, such a strategy engenders a high level of customer loyalty and mitigates the probability of customer attrition due to competitive pricing (Makedon & Baylova, 2023).

Finally, the fourth direction of effective application of non-mass strategies is the integration of the carrier's logistics solutions into the client's internal business processes, which involves the transition from the "transport as a service" model to the "logistics as a functional part of the customer's production and commercial

cycle" model. Consequently, the carrier assumes responsibility not only for the delivery process, but also for the planning of logistics operations, the synchronisation with the client's production or trade schedule, accounting and document management, as well as the establishment of reporting and analytics necessary for management decisions. This level of integration involves the use of modern digital technologies: The establishment of an API connection with the customer's ERP systems facilitates the real-time access to internal logistics data, while simultaneously enabling the automated generation of documents and the collaborative forecasting of transportation volumes. Consequently, the carrier evolves from an external contractor into a strategic partner, thereby ensuring stability, transparency and predictability of the logistics component of the enterprise's activities (Makedon, et al., 2024). Concurrently, the barriers to changing logistics service providers are increasing, as the cost of switching includes not only the tariff, but also integration costs, staff training, adaptation of digital interfaces and possible disruptions in the transition process.

In order to combat the issue of dumping, it is not advisable to attempt to adhere to the established principles of large players in the market, which are predicated on scale and economies of scale. Instead, the focus should be on the development of an independent logic of market behaviour, in which quality, individualisation, service competence and flexibility become pivotal factors in determining competitiveness. Firstly, it is imperative to delineate the fundamental distinction between mass and non-mass strategies within the context of their capacity to respond to price pressure. The foundation of mass strategies lies in the pursuit of scale effects, standardisation of processes, stringent cost control, and the servicing of extensive market segments. The amalgamation of these factors enables large carriers to establish competitive, and at times, artificially low tariffs without compromising on profitability. However, the model is vulnerable to changes in market conditions, as it depends on high load factors, the stability of large contracts and low variable costs. Conversely, non-mass strategies emphasise deep specialisation, service differentiation, and the targeted coverage of stable demand segments. In these cases, the selection criteria are not price, but rather the specific

value of the service, including factors such as speed, adaptability, availability, guarantees, personalisation, and integration with the client's business processes (Avanesova et al., 2021).

The efficacy of non-mass strategies in the context of combating dumping can be analysed through a number of key performance indicators. These allow an assessment not only of the financial results of the carrier's activities, but also of the level of operational sustainability, customer loyalty and the ability to adapt to environmental changes. The primary indicator under consideration is marginality, defined as the difference between the price of the service and the costs of its provision. In the case of mass strategies, marginality is usually low, but this is offset by scale when the carrier works "on quantity", striving for maximum load. The non-mass approach, on the other hand, enables higher prices to be set due to uniqueness and additional services, providing a more stable cash flow and reducing dependence on transportation volumes, even at lower volumes.

The second indicator is customer loyalty. In the mass segment, customer loyalty is usually low, with customers mainly orienting themselves towards the lowest price. They also change suppliers easily, and each new dumping player can reshape competitors' customer bases. In non-mass strategic models, forming long-term relationships with customers who value not only transportation, but also responsibility, accuracy, reliability, and support becomes the basis for stable orders and reduces the risk of income loss due to short-term price fluctuations. Enterprises that have chosen a specialised service model tend to rely on regular customers for 70–80% of their income, whereas mass operators often rely on this source of income for less than 50% of their income (Browne, McLeod & Woxenius, 2024).

The third indicator that allows us to assess the effectiveness of a strategic approach is operational resilience. This is demonstrated by a company's ability to continue operating effectively in the face of external shocks such as fuel price fluctuations, changes in the tax burden, seasonal demand and supply chain disruptions. Companies that implement non-mass strategies demonstrate greater operational agility, enabling them to swiftly adjust schedules, routes, volumes and prices in response to evolving customer demands. This adaptability is paramount for survival in an

unpredictable environment. While large mass carriers face the problem of "inertia of scale", which makes it impossible to quickly reconfigure their entire logistics system, small, specialised operators can transform their route network, tariff policy, or service schedule in a matter of days, or even hours. This enables them to respond to changes in demand with a level of accuracy and speed that is unavailable to mass players.

The present study employs three key factors that determine the effectiveness of a carrier's strategic positioning in dumping conditions (scale of operating activities, level of service specialisation, and degree of integration with client processes) to construct a structural matrix shown in Fig. 2.

The matrix is two-dimensional, since each factor is assessed at two alternative levels: The categories employed for this study were "low/medium" and "high". In consequence of the combination of these parameters, eight characteristic strategic configurations are formed. For each of these, it is advisable to recommend an organisational management model that best meets the goals of a non-mass strategy in a dumping market (Petrukha et al., 2022).

The fundamental impact of a non-mass strategy in conditions of dumping is to transcend the price competition zone itself, that is, to extricate oneself from the domain of direct competition for the lowest price. This option is implemented by creating a market position where a competitor cannot easily replicate the service model without a complete transformation of its business system. For instance, if a carrier guarantees delivery to a warehouse within a specified time window, maintains an integrated document flow, provides regular temperature monitoring of cargo in transit, and responds promptly to client manager requests, even a competitor's price that is half as low will not always encourage the customer to change supplier. In the non-massive model, a high switching barrier (switching costs) is formed, which is an important tool for combating dumping as a temporary attempt to force a product out of the market through price.

The efficacy of non-mass strategies in protecting against price pressure is evidenced by a number of practical examples from the market. In particular, the case of a company headquartered in Central Ukraine that specialises in the delivery of pharmaceuticals to a network of pharmacies

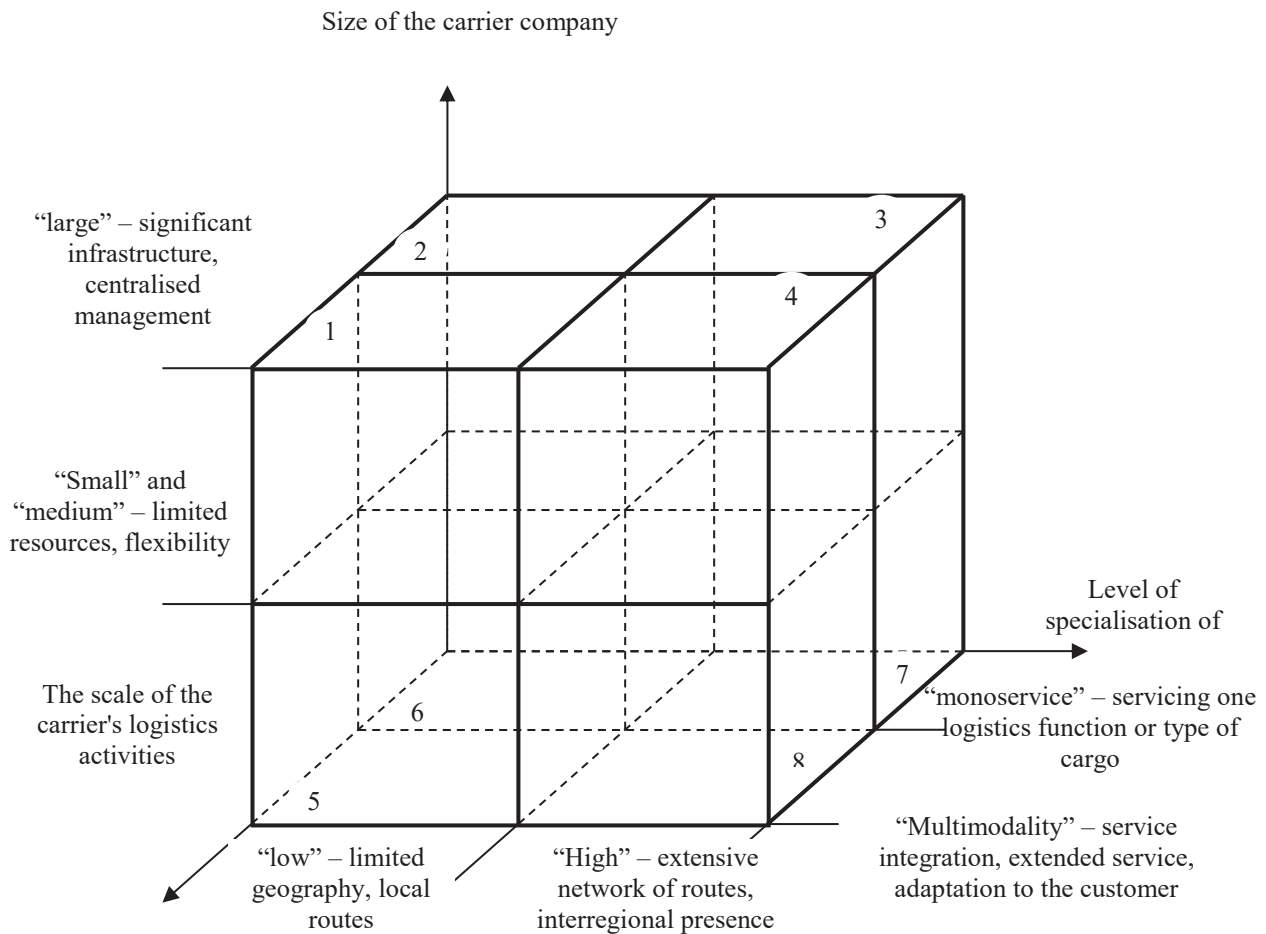


Figure 2. Strategic matrix of positioning of freight carriers by scale of activity, size of the enterprise and level of specialisation in conditions of dumping

Source: generated by the author

within a single region offers a compelling illustration of this phenomenon. The company's strategic combination of temperature control, the deployment of specially trained personnel, the implementation of a customer notification system, and the establishment of stable delivery schedules enabled it to not only maintain its existing customer base during a period of active dumping by the national logistics operator, but also to successfully raise tariffs by 8–12% without any loss of contracts (Petrukha, et al., 2022). Another example is a Kyiv-based carrier providing a door-to-door delivery service for online furniture stores. This demonstrates that specialisation in a particular service and adaptation to the requirements of the end consumer has allowed it to maintain profitability during periods when mass companies have offered reduced tariffs without providing a full service (see Table 2).

Examples of non-mass strategies are also becoming widespread in international practice: European small transport companies that serve niche markets, such as transporting organic products, art objects or individual exhibition sets, operate in an environment where dumping is technically impossible. This is because service standards and logistics solution requirements are too specific to be scalable within the mass model.

6. Conclusions

The potential of non-mass strategies in freight transportation has been recognised as an effective means of achieving strategic positioning and avoiding fierce price competition. This approach involves focusing on specific, high-potential market segments where the key lies not only in transporting cargo, but also in comprehensively

Table 2

Assessment of the effectiveness of using non-mass strategies to counteract dumping in the base market

Strategic approach	Key mechanism	Marginality level	Resilience to market shocks	Case of successful application
Specialised logistics	Focus on cargo with specific requirements (temperature, security)	High (15–25%) due to the uniqueness of the service	High: flexibility in routes and schedules	Temperature-controlled delivery of pharmaceuticals in Ukraine
Personalised delivery	Individual schedules and services "for the client"	Medium to high (10–20%) due to premium rates	Medium: Dependence on customer loyalty	Door-to-door furniture delivery for online stores in Kyiv
Niche geography	Serving low-competitive regions	High (20–30%) due to lack of price pressure	High: adaptation to local conditions	Transportation to remote regions of Central Ukraine
Integration into the client's business	Transparent document flow, reporting, monitoring	Average (8–15%) due to stable contracts	High: Long-term relationships reduce risks	Logistics for pharmacy chains with a notification system
Service branding	Building a reputation for reliability and quality	High (15–25%) due to loyalty and switching barriers	Medium: need for brand investment	Transporting organic products in Europe with a focus on safety

Source: generated by the author

meeting individual customer needs through increased service differentiation and close integration of logistics services into business processes. In this context, a two-dimensional strategic matrix has been developed to reflect the position of freight carriers in terms of the degree of specialisation of their services and the depth of their interaction with customers. The matrix identifies eight typical organisational behaviour models that are particularly relevant in conditions of high-level dumping competition. It can also be used as an analytical basis for developing, correcting or transforming the business strategy of a logistics operator.

The implementation of non-mass strategies has proven effective in several interrelated areas.

These include geographical specialisation, which involves working in regions with relatively low competition but increased requirements for logistics service quality. This enables operators to stand out due to their high-quality service. Another important factor is the focus on certain types of cargo that require specialised technologies, equipment or expert knowledge, particularly refrigerated, dangerous or valuable cargo. An effective customer retention mechanism is personalised pricing and differentiated services that take into account each customer's specific needs, volumes and business features. This contributes to the formation of trusting, long-term relationships.

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Received on: 16th of January, 2026

Accepted on: 04th of March, 2026

Published on: 27th of March, 2026