

Fillers Keepers! Purchase Behaviour under Threshold-Based Free Shipping

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Cite as:

Burbulea Veronica, Gijsenberg Maarten, BIJMOLT TAMMO, Hirche Christian (2026), Fillers Keepers! Purchase Behaviour under Threshold-Based Free Shipping. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (132661)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



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Abstract

Threshold-based free shipping is a popular policy adopted by online retailers to recoup (part of) the relatively high logistics costs they encounter. However, it is commonly argued that such policy may induce strategic filler purchasing by consumers: adding a product to the shopping basket at the end of the shopping trip only with the aim of exceeding the free shipping threshold. This paper investigates how threshold-based free shipping impacts purchase behaviour, and whether filler products are more or less prone to being returned. Insights are based on the analysis of a huge database from a major European online retailer containing 25.88 million orders of 82.68 million items from 3.80 million customers, covering a broad range of product categories. Results show that threshold-based free shipping is associated with higher number of orders, that are smaller in size and value, and less diverse. Counter to what is commonly argued, filler purchases, often coming from frequently purchased product categories, are less likely to be returned compared to regular purchases. Retailers can thus benefit from strategic purchasing, as fillers turn out to be keepers.

Track: Retailing & Omni-Channel Management