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CONSUMER REACTIONS TO THE REMOVAL OF THE DE MINIMIS THRESHOLD IN E-COMMERCE FOR LOW-VALUE GOODS IMPORTED FROM CHINA TO THE UNITED STATES

ABSTRACT

Objectives: *The aim of this study is to identify changes in individual consumer behaviour following the removal of the de minimis threshold in e-commerce for low-value goods imported from China to the United States, with particular attention to the type of logistics service.*

Material and methods: *The study was conducted using an original questionnaire administered to 566 consumers in the United States.*

Results: *Most respondents reduced their purchases, while 17,8% shifted towards US purchases and 17,8% reduced purchases from China. Changes in purchasing behaviour were also reflected in a shift from the direct logistics service model towards hybrid and local models. The post-change choice of logistics service option was more strongly associated with previous logistics preferences than with the analysed respondent characteristics.*

Conclusions: *To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first empirical investigation of consumer responses to the removal of the de minimis threshold in e-commerce, based on primary data collected directly from U.S. consumers purchasing from the Shein and Temu platforms.*

KEYWORDS: *Trump, tariffs, e-commerce, Temu, Shein, supply chain management, geopolitics*

INTRODUCTION

China is the primary source of low-value import transactions. This is associated with the growing popularity of online retail platforms such as Shein and Temu (Mínguez & Minondo, 2025), as well as with the supply flexibility observed across multiple industries. The existing regulatory approach has been based on maintaining *de minimis* thresholds (i.e. low-value shipments exempt from import duties up to USD 800), justified by the economic inefficiency of subjecting such shipments to full customs and tax procedures, as administrative costs often exceeded the potential fiscal revenues (Yeleussizova et al., 2024).

The *de minimis* threshold – by exempting low-value shipments from duties and simplifying procedures – significantly reduces transaction costs. At the same time, this mechanism constrains the ability of states to monitor trade flows, as, according to Foster (2025), it creates tension between market efficiency and the regulatory capacity of the state.

It should be noted, however, that the period 2024 – 2026 has witnessed a clear shift in the regulatory paradigm. In particular, the United States has

intensified efforts to limit the use of the *de minimis* threshold in e-commerce, especially with regard to imports from China. This reflects a continuation of Trump's policy, manifested in a more assertive approach to trade with China (Fiedler, 2025). These changes are driven not only by fiscal considerations, but also by growing concerns related to the competitiveness of domestic enterprises, product quality control, and supply chain security.

This phenomenon is particularly evident in the operations of platforms such as Shein and Temu, which have thus far leveraged cost advantages, digital optimisation, and direct-to-consumer shipping (Kaufman, 2023). They are now required to adapt to new conditions by modifying their logistics service models. This has significant implications for cross-border e-commerce logistics (Li, 2022).

Empirical evidence indicates that the rapid growth in the volume of low-value shipments – reaching billions annually – is largely driven by price advantages rather than local preferences (Ermecke et al., 2023; Moriuchi, 2021). Nevertheless, in the context of increasingly prominent rhetoric emphasising the need to protect domestic markets, as well as geopolitical tensions between major powers such as the United States and China, and alongside changes in logistics service models, the relative importance of price and delivery time may diminish, while the attractiveness of US-based platforms compared to Chinese ones may increase. On the other hand, adjustments in logistics models and the use of dumping pricing strategies to maintain access to a large and attractive market may result in consumers remaining unaware of, or unaffected by, these changes.

Accordingly, the aspects of consumer behaviour examined include perceptions of the effects of changes in import policy and their consequences for consumers' choices regarding logistics service models.

In light of the above, the following research questions were formulated:

- Q1: *How did consumers' purchasing behaviour change in terms of purchase volume and choice of supply source following changes in import regulations?*
- Q2: *How have U.S. consumers' behaviours regarding the choice of logistics service models for online purchases changed in response to changes in import rules?*
- Q3: *Did age, place of residence, financial situation, or the category of products purchased differentiate the likelihood of switching from one logistics service model to another?*

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to identify changes in individual consumer behaviour in response to the removal of the *de minimis* threshold in e-commerce for low-value goods imported from China to the United States, with particular emphasis on the type of logistics service.

As a consequence of the above considerations the following proposition was formulated:

A change has occurred in the behaviour of consumers making cross-border purchases through e-commerce platforms with regard to the choice of logistics service models following the removal of the de minimis threshold for low-value goods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic literature lacks empirical studies that take into account consumer purchasing behaviour following Trump's removal of the *de minimis* threshold in 2025. Existing publications instead tend to focus on the historical development of such systems across the major jurisdictions (Freund et al., 2025; Meiren & Jerzewska, 2026). Among others, Du et al. (2025), in describing the context of the introduction of the *de minimis* threshold for low-value goods imported from China to the United States, argue that, according to some commentators, *de minimis* was not a loophole but rather a component of US customs law, enacted by Congress in order to reduce costs for consumers and improve supply chain efficiency for small businesses in the United States (Congressional Research Service, 2024). This does not mean, however, that the arrangement was beneficial for all US firms, as businesses operating under traditional models were placed at a competitive disadvantage (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2025). Hence, calls for a redesign of the *de minimis* rules emerged in the public debate (Keong et al., 2026). A review of the academic literature demonstrates that tariff increases resulting from the trade war between the United States and China have a significant effect on the prices of imported products (Cavallo et al., 2021; Fajgelbaum & Khandelwal, 2022).

Since the *de minimis* threshold in this market segment was removed only in May 2025, information on the negative impact of this change on prices, shipment volumes, and platform user activity was drawn from non-peer-reviewed publications (Hall & McLymore, 2025; Jayaram & McLymore, 2025). Among

other sources, in documents prepared in connection with its planned IPO, Shein stated that the removal of the *de minimis* exemption from May 2025 had adversely affected its U.S. sales and overall growth, while Shein's U.S. revenue in the first quarter of 2026 declined by 14,3% year on year (SHEIN Global Holdings Limited, 2026). Significant declines were also confirmed in a report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) (Sutter & Sutherland, 2026).

Given that tariff increases affect product prices, it may be assumed that price changes in ecommerce for low-value goods will lead to a reconfiguration of supply chains. However, this direction is not entirely straightforward. First, although such goods may become more expensive, they may still be perceived as inexpensive within consumers' overall shopping baskets. Second, the competitive behaviour of major online platforms (Matsepe et al., 2025) may mean that actual price increases are at least partly offset. This may result from already observable changes in logistics service models, involving a shift from predominantly air-based delivery to lower-cost maritime transport. In this way, the bulk shipment of goods to warehouses in the United States may generate economies of scale and lower prices. Platforms may absorb part of the associated charges or incorporate them into the product price.

METHODOLOGY

The research population consists of individual consumers in the United States who purchase goods via the Chinese shopping platforms Shein and/or Temu. The United States is the largest destination market for both platforms (ECDB, 2026). The goods are shipped directly from China (or, for example, via Mexico).

Shein and Temu were selected for the study because rankings identify them as among the platforms with the largest shares in cross-border trade (Figure 1). In addition, these platforms operate according to a similar service model, in which logistics costs are typically already included in the product price.

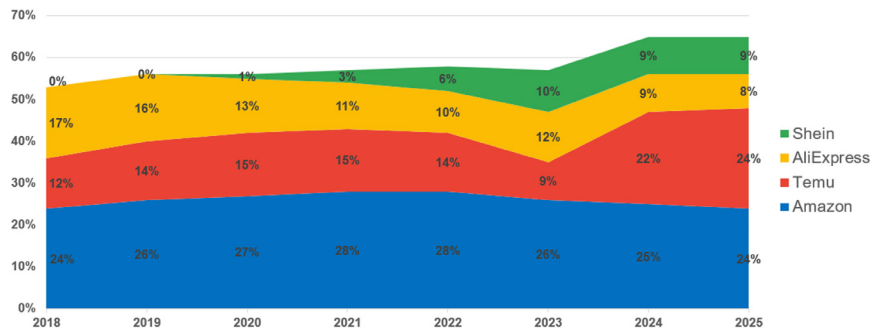
The present study focuses exclusively on the behaviour and experiences of individual consumers in the context of e-commerce.

The study covered purchases in sectors including consumer electronics and technical accessories, as well as clothing. These sectors were selected because of their high sensitivity to price changes. According to the latest report by

the International Post Corporation (n.d.), the selected products are among the most frequently purchased items in cross-border trade.

Figure 1. *Changes in the structure of the e-commerce market: the strengthening positions of Temu and Shein*

Shein



Source: Based on International Post Corporation (n.d.).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered electronically to respondents.

The research questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, including single-choice and multiple-choice questions, as well as questions using a Likert scale. One of the questions employed a 7-point Likert scale.

The collected research material was subject to qualitative verification by the Research Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited through Prolific, an online research platform that enables rapid and ethical access to respondents. Its data quality control system includes the use of attention-check questions as well as the possibility of excluding participants who do not meet the study requirements.

Four screening criteria were applied during respondent selection: (1) Demographic: Current Country of Residence: USA; (2) Demographic: Nationality: USA; (3) Online Shopping Frequency: at least once a month; and (4) consumers purchasing low-priced clothing or electronics (up to USD 800) on Shein or Temu both before and after 2 May 2025, when higher tariffs were introduced. Respondent selection was purposive and targeted individuals who

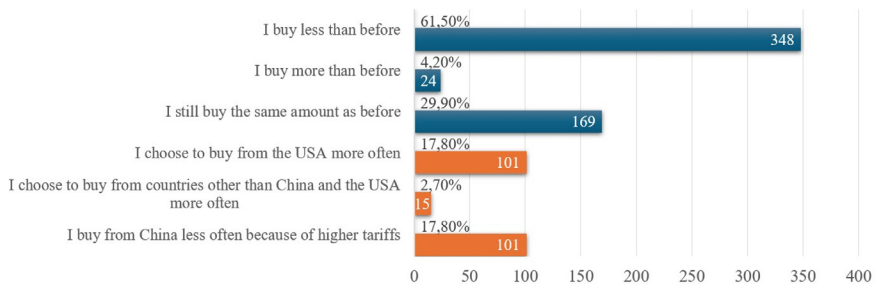
met all the adopted eligibility criteria. The initial research sample comprised 609 respondents. First, respondents who answered the control questions incorrectly were excluded, followed by those who provided incorrect answers to the detailed questions. As a result, 566 completed questionnaires were retained for analysis.

The analyses were conducted using Statistica 13 (version 13.3.721.0) and the Zestaw Plus 5.1.0 package. The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0,05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data indicate that more than 60% of Shein and/or Temu customers purchase fewer low-value goods than before 2 May 2026. A noticeable shift away from the Chinese market can be observed, accompanied by a greater tendency to purchase from the domestic market (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Changes in purchase volume and geographical directions following the removal of the de minimis threshold in 2025*



Source: own study.

Given the novelty of the topic and the resulting lack of empirical academic studies, the dynamic direction of the transition to new service models was identified on the basis of current literature published by Reuters, Business Insider, Supply Chain Dive, and McKinsey. Three main logistics service models for low-value e-commerce shipments were distinguished.

In the direct model, following the removal of the *de minimis* threshold, the shipment is usually transported by air from China to the United States in a B2C relationship and, upon arrival, is sent to a customs clearance point. From

a logistics perspective, the chain is simplified. However, from the perspective of documentation and administrative procedures, it is more complex. In addition, shipments sometimes have to wait to be consolidated.

In the hybrid model, a logistics partner of the Chinese platform (e.g. Temu – Easy Export in Shanghai) consolidates goods, completes customs clearance, and exports them in bulk. Subsequently, under a ‘local badge’ arrangement (once the goods are already in the United States), another partner (e.g. WINIT in California for Temu) stores the shipments, fulfils orders, and carries out local distribution. In this model, maritime transport is the dominant mode of transportation. In most cases, the importer of record and the payer of duties is the logistics operator acting on behalf of the platform and its sellers.

The third model, the local model, involves abandoning imports from China in favour of purchases made entirely through US-based platforms with domestic warehousing and distribution infrastructure. In this case, order fulfilment takes place exclusively within a domestic supply chain.

The *direct* variant after May 2025 was treated as a modified equivalent of the direct model used before the regulatory change. In both cases, the same delivery method was maintained, namely direct air shipment from China. However, the pre-change variant was offered at a low price level, whereas the post-change variant was associated with an average price level.

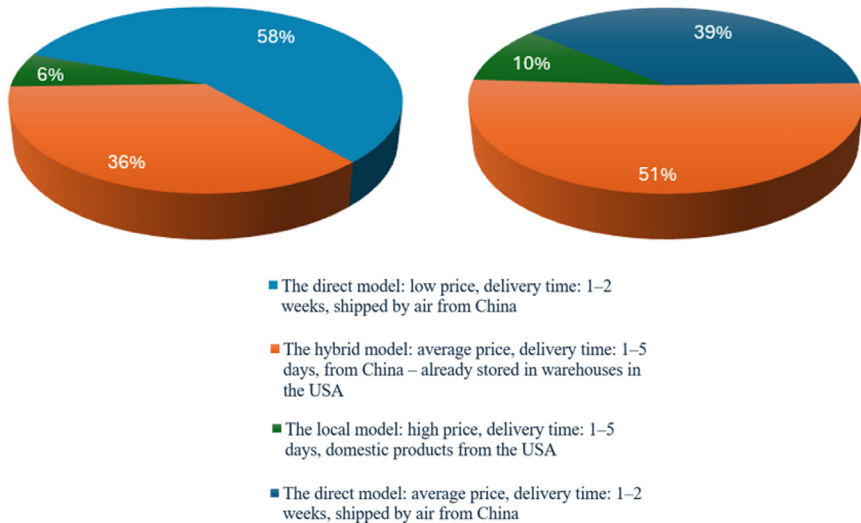
Respondents’ indications regarding their preferred order fulfilment options for low-value goods suggest a shift towards models characterised by shorter delivery times and slightly higher prices (which include both the cost of the product itself and logistics services) (Figure 3). A greater proportion of respondents also opt for higher prices combined with domestic fulfilment.

The comparison of the distributions indicates a clear change in the structure of preferences between the analysed periods. The share of the direct model decreased from 58,0% to 38,5% (–19,4 percentage points), while the share of the hybrid model increased by 15,4 percentage points and that of the local model by 4,1 percentage points.

Among the 328 respondents who selected the direct model before the change, 133 (40,5%) remained with this model, whereas 176 (53,7%) switched to the hybrid model and 19 (5,8%) to the local model. Among respondents who had previously selected the hybrid model, more than half, 111 (54,4%), retained

this preference, while 79 (38,7%) switched to the direct model and 14 (6,9%) to the local model. The local model exhibited the highest level of stability, with 24 out of 34 respondents (70,6%) maintaining this preference.

Figure 3. *Most frequently chosen online shopping options before and after the introduction of Trump's tariffs (before May 2025 – left; from May 2025 – right)*



Source: own study.

An important finding is the clear shift in preferences from the direct model towards the hybrid model, accounting for 53,7% of transitions.

The Stuart-Maxwell test showed a statistically significant change in the distribution of preferences for logistics models between the measurements conducted before and after the change, $\chi^2(2) = 47,47$, $p < 0,001$. This means that the overall proportions of respondents choosing the direct, hybrid, and local models differed between the two periods. The significant result of Bowker's test, $\chi^2(3) = 49,21$, $p < 0,001$, further indicated asymmetry in transitions between the models, meaning that movements between individual pairs of models did not occur with equal frequency in both directions.

Additional post-hoc analyses following the Stuart-Maxwell test, based on McNemar tests, confirmed the significance of changes for the individual

models ($p\text{Holm} < 0,001$). Bowker's test, in turn, indicated significant asymmetry in transitions between all pairs of models, with the strongest asymmetry observed for transitions from the direct to the hybrid model ($p\text{Holm} < 0,001$).

The shift in consumer preferences towards the hybrid model increases the importance of local warehousing and domestic order fulfilment and, consequently, leads to a change in the structure of platforms' operating costs, with greater importance attached to warehousing, inventory management, and domestic distribution costs. From the perspective of logistics operators, the findings indicate the growing importance of services involving import consolidation, customs clearance, and domestic last-mile delivery. For policymakers, this means that the design of *de minimis* regulations should take into account not only their impact on consumer prices, but also their effects on supply chain structures, the organisation of imports, and the development of domestic logistics infrastructure. At the same time, regulatory changes may encourage platforms to diversify their sourcing and partially relocate production to other countries, as illustrated by Shein's attempt to increase the use of production and warehousing facilities in Vietnam. Market diversification may constitute a potential alternative to production diversification (Chen et al., 2026).

To deepen the analysis, multinomial logistic regression was applied. These analyses were conducted to assess whether preferences regarding the logistics service variant, as reflected in purchasing responses, were associated with socio-demographic characteristics.

The basic predictors included the logistics service variant selected by the respondent before the change in import rules, age, place of residence, and financial situation. Subsequent models additionally examined the importance of product categories (clothing and/or electronics). The results of the analyses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Results of multinomial logistic regression models for the logistics service variant after the change in import rules*

Model	N	Variant before the change $\chi^2(df)$; p	Age $\chi^2(df)$; p	Place of residence $\chi^2(df)$; p	Financial situation $\chi^2(df)$; p	Additional predictor $\chi^2(df)$; p
Model 1	566	80,51 (4); <0,001	4,46 (2); 0,108	4,48 (4); 0,345	8,58 (6); 0,199	-
Model 2	566	77,73 (4); <0,001	4,39 (2); 0,111	4,55 (4); 0,336	8,26 (6); 0,220	Product categories: 1,41 (4); 0,843
Model 3	536	73,61 (4); <0,001	3,46 (2); 0,177	4,40 (4); 0,354	6,88 (6); 0,332	Platform - clothing: 4,37 (4); 0,358
Model 4	291	55,64 (4); <0,001	0,07 (2); 0,965	2,85 (4); 0,584	6,16 (6); 0,405	Platform - electronics: 5,71 (4); 0,222

Notes: N – sample size included in a given model; $\chi^2(df)$ – likelihood-ratio test statistic, with the number of degrees of freedom (df) given in parentheses; p – p-value.

Model 1 was adopted as the baseline model and included the entire study sample, together with the logistics service variant selected before the change in import rules, age, place of residence, and financial situation. In Model 2, Model 1 was extended to include the categories of products purchased. The additional effect of this predictor was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 1,41$, $p = 0,843$; therefore, its inclusion did not provide significant additional information to the model. In accordance with the principle of parsimony, Model 1 was retained as the main model.

Models 3 and 4 were supplementary analyses and were used to assess the importance of the platform used among respondents purchasing clothing and electronics, respectively. Due to differences in sample size, these models were not directly compared with Model 1 in terms of model fit. Across all four models, the only consistently significant factor was the logistics service variant selected before the change in import rules ($p < 0,001$). No significant global effects were found for age, place of residence, financial situation, profile of purchased products, or the platform used to purchase clothing or electronics. The results therefore indicate that the choice of logistics service variant after

the change was more strongly associated with previous logistics preferences than with the respondent characteristics analysed.

Based on the conducted research, it can be concluded that the logistics service models chosen by consumers reflect changes in purchasing behaviour resulting from the removal of the *de minimis* threshold for low-value goods.

As a consequence of the observed changes, the development of bulk shipment arrangements to warehouses in the United States is expected, either directly or via alternative destinations, alongside the development of logistics operations within shorter supply chains. In both cases, delivery times are shorter than in the model that dominated prior to May 2025. This is an outcome that was difficult to anticipate, particularly given that, in cross-border trade in low-value goods, delivery time is not a key attribute of the offer, in contrast to other markets (Tian et al., 2025).

At the same time, in the context of cross-border e-commerce, a significant reduction in perceived delivery times can be observed, resulting from the development of new logistics models, such as the use of local distribution centres in destination markets (Wang et al., 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Respondents' reactions, reflected in their choices regarding service formats, clearly indicate a shift towards a hybrid service model and, to a lesser extent, towards local purchasing.

Detailed analyses did not confirm any significant relationship between changes in the choice of logistics service model and respondents' characteristics (age, place of residence, and financial status) or the category of products purchased (clothing or electronics).

The novelty of the study lies in demonstrating that regulatory changes may lead not only to a reduction in purchasing activity but also to changes in the way purchases are organised and supported logistically.

In response to recent legislative changes, platforms are moving away from direct shipping in favour of logistics warehouses dedicated to international e-commerce (Yi & Hayashi, 2026). With the development of cross-border

warehouses and the practice of their shared use (Lin, 2019), the role of hybrid delivery models is likely to increase.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

With regard to socio-demographic characteristics and the products purchased, no significant effects of these variables were identified, suggesting that their influence on the study results was limited. However, the lack of statistical significance does not exclude the possibility that differences may occur in other populations or samples with different characteristics.

The present study may provide a comparative framework for analysing the purchasing behaviour of American and European consumers, as in 2025 the European Union agreed to abolish the customs duty exemption for consignments valued below EUR 150 (Foster, 2025). Furthermore, from 1 July 2026, the EU introduced a temporary customs duty of EUR 3 per product category, applicable until 1 July 2028 (Council of the European Union, 2026), with the possibility of extension.

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