# Tesco customers react with humour and concern to AI surveillance at self-checkouts



The recent implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) technology in some Tesco self-checkouts has sparked a wave of humorous comparisons to football's Video Assistant Referee (VAR). Shoppers jested about the resemblance after noticing the overhead cameras designed to monitor scanning errors. The system aims to combat increasing shoplifting rates by identifying items that aren’t scanned correctly and subsequently displaying a live-action replay of the scanning attempt. However, while some customers laughed off the technology, others voiced serious concerns, stating that they might avoid using self-checkouts altogether. This backlash comes in the wake of record-high shoplifting figures in the UK, with offences recorded by police surging by 20% last year.

Statistics from the Office for National Statistics reveal there were 516,971 shoplifting offences reported in England and Wales in 2024. The British Retail Consortium's figures amplify this issue further, showing a staggering 20.4 million thefts recorded by retailers, which cost the industry £2 billion. Amid rising theft, retailers are forced to respond with heightened security measures. The introduction ofAI technology at Tesco follows similar actions by competitors like Sainsbury’s, which has begun to roll out advanced AI recognition features in its self-service checkouts. A spokesperson for Sainsbury's mentioned that the move is part of ongoing assessments of security measures to ensure a seamless checkout experience for customers.

The growing concern over retail theft is not unfounded; the Co-op recently reported an £80 million loss attributable to shoplifting, underscoring the broader challenges facing UK retailers. As the financial toll of theft climbs—up from £1.8 billion the previous year to £2.2 billion—it becomes apparent that these retailers are also grappling with increasing violence and abuse towards employees. In response, Tesco has launched a multimillion-pound security hub in Northamptonshire, designed to analyse extensive CCTV footage and combat shoplifting while prioritising employee safety.

As the grocery sector increasingly turns to technology to mitigate theft risk, Sainsbury's has also announced a comprehensive overhaul of its checkout systems. With plans to upgrade 22,500 self-checkouts to incorporate AI capabilities, the supermarket seeks to enhance both security and efficiency. Sainsbury's CEO defended the transition towards self-checkouts, asserting that they significantly improve customer experience in a competitive market with dwindling profit margins. Despite some criticism, Roberts noted that self-checkouts are "popular" among a significant portion of customers.

Yet, as technological enhancements roll out, customers express divergent opinions. Some jokingly suggested the likelihood of an uncontrollable surveillance era, while others simply stated their reluctance to use self-service options moving forward. Concerns persist that these shifts in technology may inadvertently foster an environment of increased surveillance in stores, leading to privacy concerns.

With ongoing reports of retail crime and evolving shopper behaviours, supermarkets like Tesco and Sainsbury's must balance the push for technological advancements with an acute awareness of customer sentiment. The rise of AI in commerce reflects broader trends in the retail industry, but navigating the accompanying challenges will be critical for maintaining customer trust, particularly in a market marked by rising crime rates.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20q5q92y2yo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20q5q92y2yo)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20q5q92y2yo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20q5q92y2yo), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/c3d922c8-2598-4c7b-be1e-9c83bd65d044)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/c3d922c8-2598-4c7b-be1e-9c83bd65d044), [[7]](https://www.retail-systems.com/rs/Tesco_Launches_High_Tech_Security_Hub_To_Combat_Shoplifting.php)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/04/25/customers-love-our-self-checkouts-insists-sainsburys-boss/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2024/10/sainsburys-self-checkout/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20q5q92y2yo), [[2]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20q5q92y2yo), [[4]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20q5q92y2yo> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c20q5q92y2yo> - Tesco has introduced AI technology to some self-checkouts, leading customers to compare it to football's Video Assistant Referee (VAR). The system aims to reduce shoplifting by using overhead cameras to identify improperly scanned items, displaying a live-action replay on the self-service screen. While some customers mock the tech, others express concerns, with some stating they would avoid self-checkouts in the future. This initiative follows a record high in UK shoplifting in 2024, with police-recorded offences rising 20% to 516,971, and retailer-reported thefts reaching 20.4 million, costing £2 billion.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/c3d922c8-2598-4c7b-be1e-9c83bd65d044> - The Co-op reported a £80 million loss from shoplifting in the past year, reflecting broader challenges UK retailers face amid rising theft. Shoplifting in UK shops reached £2.2 billion last year, up from £1.8 billion the previous year. Retailers are contending with rising levels of violence and abuse against staff. Tesco has launched a high-tech security hub to combat shoplifting, investing millions into a 24/7 security centre in Daventry, Northamptonshire, analysing thousands of hours of CCTV footage to target shoplifters and protect staff from violence.
4. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article> - Sainsbury's is upgrading 22,500 checkouts across its estate, adding AI capabilities to self-checkouts as part of a wider technology upgrade aimed at reducing theft and improving customer experience. The 'Next Generation Checkout Systems' integrate AI to identify specific items quickly and spot suspicious items, allowing store colleagues to approve transactions remotely via tablets, reducing shrinkage and unnecessary interruptions. Sainsbury's CEO Simon Roberts defended the decision to replace manned tills with self-checkouts, stating the need for efficiency in a 3% margin business.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/04/25/customers-love-our-self-checkouts-insists-sainsburys-boss/> - Sainsbury's CEO Simon Roberts insists customers appreciate the 'speedy checkout' offered by self-service tills, despite some supermarkets moving away from them due to customer backlash. He stated that many customers like the speedy checkout and that Sainsbury's will not give up on having cashiers in shops. Concerns have been raised that self-checkouts are aiding shoplifters amid a wave of retail crime since the pandemic. Roberts emphasized that Sainsbury's is making sure to protect itself from any theft.
6. <https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2024/10/sainsburys-self-checkout/> - Sainsbury's is piloting larger self-checkout tills as a replacement for human cashiers, following its CEO's remarks about the need to make stores 'more efficient'. The new hybrid self-checkouts feature conveyor belts for customers to place their items on and designated areas for bagging purchases, although shoppers will still need to scan their own items. The trials are taking place in two supermarkets, aiming to encourage customers doing bigger shops to use self-service. CEO Simon Roberts stated that the technology has proven 'popular' among shoppers.
7. <https://www.retail-systems.com/rs/Tesco_Launches_High_Tech_Security_Hub_To_Combat_Shoplifting.php> - Tesco has unveiled a new multimillion-pound security hub in Daventry, Northamptonshire, as part of a major investment to tackle the growing problem of retail crime across its UK stores. The high-tech centre operates 24/7, analysing thousands of hours of CCTV footage to target shoplifters and protect staff from violence. Security operators monitor specific groups of stores across the UK, sharing findings with local police forces. Emma Sparrock, UK security operations centre lead at Tesco, described the initiative as transformative.