# Tesco’s VAR-style AI replays at self-checkouts spark shopper backlash over trust and efficiency



Supermarket giant Tesco is facing scrutiny and mockery for its recent introduction of 'VAR-style' artificial intelligence (AI) action replays at self-service checkouts. This technology, reminiscent of the video assistant referee system used in football, aims to enhance oversight of the checkout process by capturing footage of customers as they scan items and placing them in the bagging area. However, the rollout has sparked significant backlash from shoppers who find the technology cumbersome and intrusive.

Videos circulating on social media have shown the technology in action; one clip, which garnered nearly three million views, depicted a shopper correctly scanning a tin of tuna but quickly moving a bottle of milk over the scanner. The system then displayed footage of the incident, highlighting the perceived farcical nature of the AI's surveillance. Upon detecting an unscanned item, the checkout prompts users with a message to correct the presumed error, emphasising how the new system may actually prolong the already frustrating checkout experience. Many customers took to social media to vent their frustrations, arguing that the technology effectively turns honest shoppers into suspected thieves, creating an environment that diminishes trust between retailers and customers.

This reaction echoes sentiments expressed after competitor Sainsbury’s introduced a similar AI system, where shoppers also received replays of their scanning mistakes. Just one month prior to Tesco’s implementation, Sainsbury's began to enhance its self-checkout experience as part of a larger initiative to combat rising theft. The integration of AI at its 22,500 self-checkouts, designed for greater efficiency and theft reduction, underscores a shifting trend among retailers seeking to utilise technology for operational improvements. However, as with Tesco, challenges around customer experience remain prevalent. One user on Reddit aptly summarised this frustration: “Can't believe customer service is now so in the bin you're constantly treated like a thief.”

The introduction of such invasive technology comes against a backdrop of alarmingly rising shoplifting statistics in the UK. In 2024 alone, police recorded over 516,000 incidents, a staggering increase of 20% compared to the previous year. However, the British Retail Consortium suggests that the actual number could be much higher, with estimates reaching around 20.4 million thefts last year. This troubling trend of rising theft poses challenges for supermarkets, as they grapple with maintaining customer trust while securing their bottom line.

In response to the scepticism surrounding the new system, Tesco has defended its decision, asserting that it aims to make the checkout process smoother and faster. According to the company, the system helps customers identify any unscanned items, ostensibly enhancing their shopping experience. However, critics argue that this technology may instead exacerbate existing frustrations associated with self-service checkouts, making them even less user-friendly.

Furthermore, the implementation of AI in retail is not limited to self-service checkouts; Tesco is also exploring innovative technologies in its stores. At its Fulham Reach Express GetGo store, the company is trialling a shopping experience that eliminates the need for scanning altogether, allowing customers to pick items and receive a digital list at checkout. While such advancements aim to streamline operations, they highlight the delicate balance retailers must strike between security measures and customer satisfaction.

As technology continues to evolve, it remains to be seen whether these innovations will ultimately enhance the shopping experience or lead to further alienation among customers already grappling with self-checkout frustrations. In the face of increasing theft and changing customer expectations, the challenge ahead for Tesco and its competitors is how to integrate technology in a manner that fosters trust, rather than suspicion.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14757623/Tesco-mocked-VAR-style-AI-action-replays-self-service.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.insideworldsoccer.com/2025/05/sainsburys-var-cameras-shoplifting.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article), [[7]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sainsburys-self-checkout-var-scan-shoplift-b2745502.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article), [[5]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/tesco/tesco-strips-out-manned-checkouts-in-larger-store-layout-overhaul/670396.article)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://redresscompliance.com/case-study-tescos-use-of-ai-to-improve-supply-chain-operations-and-customer-experience/), [[5]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/tesco/tesco-strips-out-manned-checkouts-in-larger-store-layout-overhaul/670396.article)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/money/tesco-trialling-magic-way-shoppers-31441250), [[6]](https://www.insideworldsoccer.com/2025/05/sainsburys-var-cameras-shoplifting.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14757623/Tesco-mocked-VAR-style-AI-action-replays-self-service.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article> - Sainsbury's is enhancing its self-checkouts by integrating AI capabilities to improve efficiency and reduce theft. The upgrade, in partnership with NCR Voyix, involves 22,500 checkouts across various store formats. The AI system, named Picklist, uses computer vision to quickly identify items and detect suspicious products, allowing store colleagues to approve transactions remotely. This initiative aims to streamline the checkout process and provide real-time data for better sales forecasting and personalized promotions.
3. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/money/tesco-trialling-magic-way-shoppers-31441250> - Tesco is trialling innovative technology at its Fulham Reach Express GetGo store, allowing customers to shop without scanning items. Shoppers can pick products from shelves and approach the checkout, which automatically presents a list of selected items. This system, similar to Tesco's GetGo app, eliminates the need for manual scanning and offers immediate printed receipts, enhancing the shopping experience by reducing wait times and simplifying the checkout process.
4. <https://redresscompliance.com/case-study-tescos-use-of-ai-to-improve-supply-chain-operations-and-customer-experience/> - Tesco leverages artificial intelligence (AI) to optimise supply chain management, personalise promotions, and enhance self-service checkouts. AI-powered cameras and sensors in self-service checkouts detect scanning errors and reduce transaction delays, improving speed and accuracy. The system monitors items during checkout, identifies unscanned products, and alerts customers or staff to correct issues, ensuring accurate transactions and a smoother shopping experience.
5. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/tesco/tesco-strips-out-manned-checkouts-in-larger-store-layout-overhaul/670396.article> - Tesco is removing main banks of manned checkouts from several larger stores, shifting towards self-service checkouts. The supermarket cited successful trials of new trolley-accessible self-checkouts and a lack of customer demand for traditional tills. This move aims to repurpose floor space and reduce staff costs, aligning with the trend of increasing self-service options in retail environments.
6. <https://www.insideworldsoccer.com/2025/05/sainsburys-var-cameras-shoplifting.html> - Sainsbury's is introducing 'VAR-style' cameras at self-checkout tills to combat a surge in shoplifting offences across the UK. The system displays instant video replays when an item is not properly scanned, accompanied by a message prompting customers to check their scanning. This approach aims to deter potential theft without escalating tensions between customers and staff, as shoplifting incidents have risen significantly in recent years.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sainsburys-self-checkout-var-scan-shoplift-b2745502.html> - Sainsbury's has implemented 'VAR-style' cameras at self-checkouts to deter shoplifting. The cameras display replays when items are not scanned correctly, accompanied by a message prompting customers to check their scanning. This measure comes amid a record number of shoplifting offences in England and Wales, with over 500,000 recorded cases in 2024, marking a 20% increase from the previous year.