# Tesco’s new self-service checkouts spark privacy concerns amid retail tech push



In a bid to streamline the shopping experience and enhance security, Tesco has rolled out a new self-service checkout system featuring a camera that monitors customers as they scan and pack their groceries. This technology, designed for select Tesco stores, includes playback clips that activate when an item is improperly scanned, providing feedback such as, "It looks like that last item didn’t scan." According to the company, the initiative aims to make the checkout process quicker and more efficient.

Responses from customers have been mixed. While some appreciate the technological advancement, others have voiced concerns on social media about the intrusive nature of being monitored while shopping. One user expressed frustration, asserting that such measures should not be necessary in modern society, while another suggested a simpler alternative: “Just bring back staffed tills.”

Tesco's move towards self-service checkouts is not an isolated incident. The supermarket's recent strategy aligns with an overarching trend in the retail industry where many chains are opting for self-service solutions to reduce costs and repurpose store space. In August 2022, Tesco announced plans to eliminate main banks of manned checkouts across several larger locations, marking a significant shift away from traditional shopping methods.

Sainsbury's has similarly adopted this trend. Earlier this month, the chain introduced its own "VAR-style" checkouts, equipped with a similar camera system. This new measure also aims to improve the checkout experience while tackling shoplifting by providing feedback to customers when scanning errors occur. Reactions from Sainsbury's customers reveal a similar sentiment, with many expressing dissatisfaction. One shopper described the system as a “ridiculous” way to treat customers, while another highlighted the challenges it poses for more vulnerable populations, such as the elderly.

Further advancements in this area are being explored by Sainsbury's as they look to integrate artificial intelligence into 22,500 self-checkouts. This technology aims to quickly identify unbarcoded items and facilitate remote transaction approvals by staff, thereby enhancing efficiency and combating theft. As these chains grapple with balancing customer convenience and operational costs, the emphasis on self-service solutions continues to spark debate among shoppers about the future of in-store retail.

The integration of technology in supermarkets raises questions about the role of personal interaction in shopping. While some customers may value the speed and autonomy offered by self-service options, others feel alienated by what they perceive as a cold, impersonal experience. As supermarkets like Tesco and Sainsbury's continue to evolve their checkout technologies, the challenge will be to navigate customer preferences while maintaining a secure, efficient shopping environment.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25199555.tesco-rolls-new-var-style-checkouts-uk-stores/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/tesco/tesco-strips-out-manned-checkouts-in-larger-store-layout-overhaul/670396.article)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25199555.tesco-rolls-new-var-style-checkouts-uk-stores/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sainsburys-self-checkout-var-scan-shoplift-b2745502.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article), [[6]](https://www.gbnews.com/lifestyle/sainsburys-self-service-till-security-crackdown)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/10/17/sainsburys-trials-larger-self-checkouts-conveyor-belts/), [[7]](https://www.retailcustomerexperience.com/news/sainsburys-debuts-ai-powered-checkouts/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/25199555.tesco-rolls-new-var-style-checkouts-uk-stores/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/tesco/tesco-strips-out-manned-checkouts-in-larger-store-layout-overhaul/670396.article> - In August 2022, Tesco announced the removal of main banks of manned checkouts from several larger stores, shifting towards self-service checkouts. This decision followed successful trials of trolley self-checkouts and aimed to repurpose floor space and reduce staff costs. The move aligns with a broader trend in the retail industry towards self-service options. ([thegrocer.co.uk](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/tesco/tesco-strips-out-manned-checkouts-in-larger-store-layout-overhaul/670396.article?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article> - In August 2024, Sainsbury's announced plans to integrate AI capabilities into 22,500 self-checkouts across its stores. The technology aims to enhance the checkout process by quickly identifying unbarcoded items and allowing store staff to remotely approve transactions, thereby improving efficiency and reducing theft. ([thegrocer.co.uk](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sainsburys-self-checkout-var-scan-shoplift-b2745502.html> - In May 2025, Sainsbury's introduced a 'VAR-style' camera system at self-checkouts to deter shoplifting. Cameras above the tills record customers bagging items, and if an item isn't scanned correctly, a replay is shown with a message prompting the customer to check their scanning. This measure aims to reduce theft and improve the checkout experience. ([independent.co.uk](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sainsburys-self-checkout-var-scan-shoplift-b2745502.html?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/10/17/sainsburys-trials-larger-self-checkouts-conveyor-belts/> - In October 2024, Sainsbury's began testing larger self-checkout tills with conveyor belts in two supermarkets. These hybrid self-checkouts are designed to accommodate larger shopping loads, aiming to make the self-service process more efficient for customers with full trolleys. ([telegraph.co.uk](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/10/17/sainsburys-trials-larger-self-checkouts-conveyor-belts/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.gbnews.com/lifestyle/sainsburys-self-service-till-security-crackdown> - In May 2025, Sainsbury's implemented a new security feature at self-service tills to combat shoplifting. The system uses cameras to display a 'VAR-style' replay to customers when items aren't scanned properly, aiming to deter theft and improve the checkout experience. ([gbnews.com](https://www.gbnews.com/lifestyle/sainsburys-self-service-till-security-crackdown?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.retailcustomerexperience.com/news/sainsburys-debuts-ai-powered-checkouts/> - In September 2024, Sainsbury's integrated AI across 22,500 checkouts to enhance the self-checkout process. The technology quickly identifies unbarcoded items and allows store staff to remotely approve transactions, aiming to improve efficiency and reduce theft. ([retailcustomerexperience.com](https://www.retailcustomerexperience.com/news/sainsburys-debuts-ai-powered-checkouts/?utm_source=openai))