# Tesco’s VAR-style AI replays spark backlash amid rising supermarket thefts



Supermarket giant Tesco has recently faced a wave of mockery over its introduction of "VAR-style" AI action replays at self-service checkouts, a move that aims to enhance scanning accuracy and reduce theft. The cameras, positioned above the tills, record shoppers as they scan and pack their items. Using artificial intelligence, the system identifies instances where items have not been properly scanned before being placed in the bagging area. However, the initial response from the public has been far from positive, with many critics expressing concerns that these innovations could exacerbate the already frustrating experience of using self-service machines.

In a viral Instagram video that has garnered nearly three million views, a shopper demonstrates the technology by scanning a tin of tuna and then surreptitiously moving a bottle of milk into the bagging area without scanning it. The self-checkout registers the action and promptly displays a replay of the misstep, accompanied by a warning: "The last item wasn't scanned properly. Remove from bagging area and try again." This process, which some have likened to VAR in football, has incited humour as well as annoyance among customers, who are already accustomed to the various pitfalls of self-checkout systems.

The introduction of this technology coincides with a notable increase in theft incidents within UK supermarkets, which reached a record high in 2024 with over 516,000 reported cases—an increase of approximately 20 percent compared to the previous year. The British Retail Consortium estimates that the actual number of thefts could be as high as 20.4 million, indicating that while the motive for implementing AI surveillance is rooted in profit protection, the broader implications for customer experience raise important questions.

Responses from customers online have echoed this sentiment, with many feeling that such measures categorically treat them as potential thieves. One Reddit user remarked on the pervasive sense of distrust at self-checkouts, stating, "Can't believe customer service is now so in the bin you're constantly treated like a thief." Others expressed frustration that the introduction of AI replays would only prolong the checkout process, leading to increased delays and irritations.

In contrast, Sainsbury's has also announced similar advancements, planning to integrate AI capabilities across over 22,500 of its checkouts to streamline operations and enhance security. Their 'Next Generation Checkout Systems' aim to identify suspicious items efficiently, allowing store staff to intervene remotely. These initiatives are part of a broader industry trend that seeks to modernise retail environments while grappling with the dual challenges of theft prevention and customer service.

Despite the scepticism surrounding these AI technologies, they are not isolated to just security enhancements. For example, Tesco is piloting checkout-free shopping experiences, allowing customers at select locations to shop without the need for scanning, a feature reminiscent of its GetGo service. The initiative reflects a growing desire among retailers to offer a more seamless grocery experience in an increasingly digital age, contributing to the evolving landscape of supermarket shopping.

While Tesco maintains that these technological developments are aimed at improving the customer experience, the underlying motivations and public perceptions highlight the inherent tensions between security measures and the desire for a positive shopping experience. The implementation of such strategies raises significant issues regarding privacy, as evidenced by investigations launched by the Data Protection Commission into Tesco's use of front-facing cameras. The challenge remains for retailers to find a balance that reassures customers while effectively deterring theft.

Tesco's experience underscores the complexities of integrating advanced technology into everyday retail. As it navigates customer feedback and industry trends, the jury remains out on whether these innovations will ultimately enhance the shopping experience or further alienate shoppers disillusioned with the surveillance culture of modern retail.

## 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), [[4]](https://redresscompliance.com/case-study-tescos-use-of-ai-to-improve-supply-chain-operations-and-customer-experience/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[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), [[7]](https://www.insideworldsoccer.com/2025/05/sainsburys-var-cameras-shoplifting.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.businesspost.ie/news/data-watchdog-investigates-tesco-over-cameras-at-self-service-checkouts/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.mirror.co.uk/money/tesco-trialling-magic-way-shoppers-31441250), [[6]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/tesco/tesco-strips-out-manned-checkouts-in-larger-store-layout-overhaul/670396.article)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/tesco/tesco-strips-out-manned-checkouts-in-larger-store-layout-overhaul/670396.article), [[4]](https://redresscompliance.com/case-study-tescos-use-of-ai-to-improve-supply-chain-operations-and-customer-experience/)

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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 upgrading 22,500 checkouts across its estate by integrating AI capabilities to enhance self-checkout efficiency and reduce theft. The 'Next Generation Checkout Systems' by NCR Voyix will use AI to quickly identify specific items and detect suspicious items in the checkout area. Store colleagues can approve transactions remotely, aiming to improve the checkout process and reduce shrinkage. The initiative is part of Sainsbury's 'Future Front-End strategy' to optimise product management and store efficiencies.
3. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/money/tesco-trialling-magic-way-shoppers-31441250> - Tesco is trialling new technology at its Fulham Reach Express GetGo store, allowing customers to shop without scanning items. Shoppers can take items from shelves and walk up to the checkout, which will automatically present a list of the products they've picked up. This system aims to streamline the shopping experience by eliminating the need for manual scanning, similar to Tesco's existing 'GetGo' checkout-free feature, but without requiring the Tesco Grocery App.
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, enhance personalised promotions, and improve in-store services. AI is integrated into various operations, including demand forecasting, personalised promotions through data analytics, and AI-driven enhancements to self-service checkouts. The AI-powered self-service checkout systems use computer vision models and real-time error detection to monitor items during checkout, reducing transaction delays and improving accuracy, leading to a smoother shopping experience for customers.
5. <https://www.businesspost.ie/news/data-watchdog-investigates-tesco-over-cameras-at-self-service-checkouts/> - The Data Protection Commission is investigating Tesco over the installation of front-facing cameras at self-service checkouts in 51 Tesco Express stores in Ireland. The cameras film shoppers and display the footage in real time, raising concerns about privacy and data protection. The investigation follows seven complaints received by the Data Protection Commission regarding the use of these cameras, highlighting the need for retailers to balance security measures with customer privacy rights.
6. <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 self-checkouts designed for trolleys and a 'lack of customer demand' for traditional checkouts. This move allows Tesco to repurpose floor areas and save on staff costs. Experts suggest the change aligns with the increasing trend of self-service checkouts and the desire to reduce front-of-store staff hours.
7. <https://www.insideworldsoccer.com/2025/05/sainsburys-var-cameras-shoplifting.html> - Sainsbury's is introducing 'VAR-style' cameras at self-checkout tills to curb 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 initiative aims to deter potential theft without escalating tensions between customers and staff. The decision comes amid a record high in shoplifting offences, with over 500,000 recorded in 2024.