# Tesco adopts football-style AI at self-checkouts to tackle soaring shoplifting



In a bid to address the rising tide of shoplifting, Tesco has recently adapted a high-tech solution reminiscent of the VAR system used in football—an AI-powered detection system at their self-checkouts. This initiative follows similar successful implementations by competitors and aims to enhance the shopping experience while simultaneously curbing theft. The system involves a bird’s-eye view camera that monitors shoppers as they scan and bag items. If an item hasn’t been scanned adequately, the system notifies the customer with an instant replay of their actions, alongside a message encouraging them to rectify any mistakes.

The public’s reaction to this approach has been notably mixed. Social media users have embraced the humorous undertones of the system, drawing parallels between it and football officiating. A viral video shared on Instagram highlights a shopper attempting to “shortcut” the scanning process with a bottle of milk, only to be confronted by the AI replay showing his error. Comments ranged from playful jibes about being “offside” to humorous acknowledgments of the system's accuracy—returning serious attention to the issue of theft.

This technological advancement is timely, as the UK faces escalating challenges with retail crime. According to the British Retail Consortium, incidents of shoplifting reached a staggering 516,971 in the past year, up significantly from 429,873 in the previous year. With only about a fifth of these incidents resulting in charges, the need for effective deterrents has become increasingly urgent. Tom Ironside from the Consortium has indicated that this rise in theft not only places a £2 billion burden on retailers annually but also increases the instances of violence against staff.

Sainsbury’s, another major player in the grocery market, has also adopted similar measures, launching a comparable VAR-style camera system at their self-checkouts to combat theft. Their statistics from a recent trial revealed that the concealed detection capabilities of AI technology—drawing from machine learning to spot suspicious behaviour—could deter as much as 50% of theft attempts. Reports indicated that over 5,500 thefts were intercepted during the trial, showcasing the efficacy of this technology in creating safer shopping environments.

While both Tesco and Sainsbury’s employ advanced AI for theft deterrent purposes, customer feedback remains an essential barometer for the success of these initiatives. Although Tesco has positioned its AI solution as a gentler reminder compared to more intrusive measures, like flashing red lights or staff intervention, instances of confusion have emerged. A customer recently complained about receiving a warning due to the weight of a basil packet, underscoring the importance of fine-tuning such systems to avoid frustrating legitimate shoppers.

As retailers like Tesco and Sainsbury’s explore these technological fronts, the overarching aim remains clear: to protect both their products and their customers. By balancing security with the shopping experience, they seek to not only deter theft but also foster a more pleasant environment for all. This continued innovation in retail security represents a critical evolution in the industry, blending advanced technology with an understanding of customer dynamics, all while addressing economic pressures from rising retail crime.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746273/Tesco-follows-rivals-launching-football-inspired-shake-self-service-checkouts-amid-rise-shoplifting.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/stores/sainsburys-reports-success-of-ai-concealment-detector-to-spot-thieves/647294.article)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746273/Tesco-follows-rivals-launching-football-inspired-shake-self-service-checkouts-amid-rise-shoplifting.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[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), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2020/08/17/ai-helps-sainsburys-halve-number-thefts/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.insideworldsoccer.com/2025/05/sainsburys-var-cameras-shoplifting.html), [[7]](https://www.gbnews.com/lifestyle/sainsburys-self-service-till-security-crackdown)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/stores/sainsburys-reports-success-of-ai-concealment-detector-to-spot-thieves/647294.article), [[3]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sainsburys/sainsburys-adding-ai-to-checkouts-as-part-of-next-generation-till-upgrade/694142.article)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14746273/Tesco-follows-rivals-launching-football-inspired-shake-self-service-checkouts-amid-rise-shoplifting.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/stores/sainsburys-reports-success-of-ai-concealment-detector-to-spot-thieves/647294.article> - Sainsbury's has successfully trialed an AI-enabled 'concealment detector' in several stores, which uses machine learning to recognize and record suspicious behavior based on CCTV feeds. The technology has reportedly prevented up to 50% of thefts in the aisles where it was installed, deterring 5,591 theft attempts during the trial period from September to March. The system sends a short video of the theft to security staff when a concealment is detected, aiding in loss prevention and creating a safer environment for staff and customers.
3. <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, integrating AI capabilities to enhance the self-checkout experience and reduce theft. The 'Next Generation Checkout Systems' by NCR Voyix include AI computer recognition, enabling features like 'Picklist' to identify specific items quickly and detect suspicious items at checkout. Store colleagues can approve transactions remotely via tablets, streamlining the process and improving efficiency. This initiative aims to bolster loss prevention and provide a smoother checkout experience for customers.
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sainsburys-self-checkout-var-scan-shoplift-b2745502.html> - Sainsbury's has introduced 'VAR-style' cameras at self-checkouts to deter shoplifting. The system uses cameras above the tills to record customers bagging items, displaying a replay if an item isn't scanned correctly. A message prompts customers to check their scanning, aiming to reduce theft without escalating tensions. This measure responds to a record high in shoplifting offences, with 516,971 incidents recorded in 2024, a 20% increase from the previous year. The British Retail Consortium warns that retail crime is spiraling out of control, costing retailers over £2.2 billion annually.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2020/08/17/ai-helps-sainsburys-halve-number-thefts/> - Sainsbury's has utilized AI technology developed by British start-up ThirdEye to halve the number of thefts in its stores. The software analyzes CCTV footage to detect customers handling an unusually high number of items in aisles with high theft rates. During a six-month trial in 20 stores, the technology detected 5,591 thefts, leading to a 50% reduction in thefts in the affected aisles. The system also identifies check-out theft, where customers deliberately fail to scan items at self-checkouts, and sends short video clips to store security guards for intervention.
6. <https://www.insideworldsoccer.com/2025/05/sainsburys-var-cameras-shoplifting.html> - Sainsbury's is implementing 'VAR-style' cameras at self-checkout tills to combat a surge in shoplifting across the UK. The system records customers bagging items and displays instant video replays when an item isn't 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. The decision comes as shoplifting in England and Wales reaches a record high, with 516,971 recorded offences in 2024, a 20% increase from the previous year.
7. <https://www.gbnews.com/lifestyle/sainsburys-self-service-till-security-crackdown> - Sainsbury's has introduced a new security feature at its self-service checkouts to combat shoplifting. The system uses cameras to display a VAR-style replay to customers when items aren't scanned properly. A message prompts customers to check their scanning, aiming to reduce theft by showing shoppers video evidence of unscanned items in real time. Retail sources have described the measure as a deterrent to shoplifters, offering a more gentle reminder than flashing red lights and staff intervention. Shoppers' reactions to the new system have been mixed, with some appreciating the subtle approach and others sharing humorous anecdotes.