Once again, Prof. Sandeep manages to inspire us through one of his novel ideas.

Idea: The though experiment reminds me of two papers I have read before; (Both papers are attached to this e-mail) “Shopping 2010” which was published in 2002 by Prof. Jonathan Reynolds in University of Oxford, UK and the other one is “2012: A Retail Nightmare” which was published also in 2002 by Prof. John Dawson in University of Edinburgh, UK.

As for the employees, although they might need to stack the shelves manually, cleaning the floor can be done using robotic vacuum cleaners. Electrolux (www.electrolux.com) has already developed Trilobite 2.0 which zigzags back and forth after edging along the walls, calculating what’s been cleaned or not, due to its unique suspension system and ultrasound signals.

Entry: Instead of using thumb readers, why not use eye readers. Iris-recognition technology (http://www.iridiantech.com/) is already in use in Heathrow Airport. It can be implemented and utilised in the retail industry while being privacy-friendly. This technology not only offers convenience, but also promises higher safety and security measures.

The registration process may not be necessary at the entry, as it might be deterring especially for first-time customers. Nevertheless, it can be done at the exit after purchase by simply linking iris scan with credit card details or supermarket loyalty card.

Greeting: The automated greeting assistant (Avatar) is an interesting concept. However, enhancing the humanized element could improve the customer interaction experience. A repetitive “Welcome to Wal-Mart” might seem less genuine especially if every customer will hear the same sentence with the same tone.

What might not be agreed on is the gender matched automated assistant. Although the notion of demographic profile matching sounds appealing, the store-sections gender matching might be a controversial concept. It might create inconvenience for equalists, as it could also emphasise gender stereotypes. Therefore, giving the choice for both genders could be a better option.

Intelligent shopping cart: this is the most fascinating part of the whole experiment. It offers flexibility and information to customers. They do not need to wait and stand in front of the automated shopping assistant; on the contrary, they can shop and browse while having maximum freedom in their movement.

Nonetheless, PDAs are facing a lot of challenges nowadays, and slowly they are being integrated into the Smartphone market which is expanding successfully towards an all-in-one device.

Help finding an item: Due to the bad experience that many customers had with call centres here in the UK, this might create an adverse reaction and customers may not feel comfortable with the idea of calling a representative outside the supermarket. Instead, they can probably be referred back to the "help corner" where a real wal-mart employee will be happy to offer assistant and advice.

Emergency: another successful way to assist and help, except that three buttons on the shopping cart might be more than what customers really need. The buttons might be pressed accidentally by kids or even adults.

Checking Out: a brilliant idea to utilize RFID technology in self-checkout systems (www.fujitsu.com), which is already in use on a small scale in some high street supermarkets here in the UK (www.marksandspencer.com).

Using *"Intellickeckout"* is a valuable tool to improve customer shopping efficiency. It could also be linked to the supermarket loyalty scheme in order to offer sales discounts and product promotions based on total purchases during a certain period of time.

Shopping Analysis Service: Customers should not pay to have this service. On the contrary, they should be entitled for price reductions and freebies instead. Consumers are offering the supermarket a huge amount of information about their buying behaviour. In addition, they have to be consulted before any of this information is used by the supermarket or a third party.

Discussion: For companies, they will definitely reap vast benefits by reducing labour cost and generating customer information. On the other hand, there are some concerns about the customer service or "the customer experience", which may not be satisfying.

As for customers, the security measures are rather significant. Yet, they don't need to be taken to an extreme that would make shoppers feel like they are in a prison, especially if they need to pass through two security checks to buy an ipod for example. Therefore, the required security level can be achieved in a way where customers can feel safe but not necessarily scared.

There are two additional points that can be explored further. First is **technology adoption**. Consumers embrace technology gradually. As a result, the supermarket can not apply these technological changes all at once. It would need more time to introduce one method after the other. For that reason, a progressive ongoing approach in adaptation might be the way forward.

The second point that can be illustrated is **customer interaction**. Customers can interact with each other while shopping through their intelligent shopping carts. They can even ask each others questions regarding the products, in terms of

recommendation and usage, creating what could be called “On-floor shopping community”. Or even better, they can have a list of the top five products in the category that they are looking for, in terms of customer recommendation or supermarket sales.

As a conclusion, the experiment is truly mind stimulating and thought provoking.

Thanks for your inspiration.
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