

The Psychology of Supermarkets



Warm up

- What is your local supermarket like? Describe it in detail.
- Do you make a lot of impulse purchases when you are shopping for groceries?
- Have you ever been to a supermarket in a different country? Did you notice any big differences from those in your country?
- Do you usually go to the cashier, or do you use the self-checkout?
- What are some items you buy very often at the supermarket?



1. Read the paragraph and fill in the gaps with one of the words below.

According (a) to research, the average person spends 1.5 hours a week in supermarkets, and **grocery** (b) shopping has become a huge industry, with the rise of supermarket **chains** (c) such as Costco, Tesco, and Aldi. For most shoppers, the weekly trip to the supermarket has become so ordinary that they may not even think about the many tricks and strategies that supermarkets use to **manipulate** (d) us into spending more time and money in the store than we originally intended. Everything from the lighting, to the music, to the layout of the **aisles** (e) has been subtly designed to increase the supermarket's profit **margins** (f). Many supermarkets have even created a series of shopper **profiles** (g) to help them better understand and **predict** (h) the behaviour of different types of shoppers.

- | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| (a) 1. Depending | 2. According | 3. Relating | 4. Pretending |
| (b) 1. pharmacy | 2. nutritional | 3. staples | 4. grocery |
| (c) 1. chains | 2. funds | 3. suppliers | 4. managers |
| (d) 1. assess | 2. send | 3. manipulate | 4. discuss |
| (e) 1. fire exits | 2. staffrooms | 3. aisles | 4. attics |
| (f) 1. margins | 2. calls | 3. revenues | 4. buffers |
| (g) 1. aliases | 2. nicknames | 3. apprentices | 4. profiles |
| (h) 1. predict | 2. insist | 3. maintain | 4. Deceive |



2. Write the letter in the supermarket next to its name.

trolleys/carts *h*

baked goods aisle *b*

baskets *g*

cashier *i*

security scanner *j*

shelves *d*

cash register *f*

fridge *c*

scales *e*


deli *a*





3. Quiz your partner and write down their choices. Feel free to discuss their answers in depth.

<p>1. Do you prepare a shopping list in advance?</p> <p>a) Why bother? b) I should, but I usually don't. c) Most of the time, but not always. d) Of course, how would I shop without one?</p>	<p>2. How often do you go to the grocery store?</p> <p>a) Whenever I run out of food. b) I go if there are good deals. c) A couple of times a week. d) Once a week like clockwork.</p>
<p>3. How long do you usually take to go from entry to exit?</p> <p>a) 5-15 mins. b) 15-30 mins. c) 30-45 mins. d) 45 mins or more.</p>	<p>4. What type of supermarket do you prefer?</p> <p>a) Convenience stores. b) Huge bulk discounters such as Costco. c) Small, family-run grocery stores. d) Large, modern supermarkets.</p>
<p>5. How often do you make impulse purchases at the supermarket?</p> <p>a) About half of my groceries are impulse purchases. b) If something is on sale I might pick it up. c) Maybe once or twice per trip, if they're small things. d) If it's not on the list, it's not going in the trolley.</p>	<p>6. What is the most important section of a supermarket for you?</p> <p>a) The fresh produce area, fruit and veg! b) The discount section. c) The deli and dairy sections. d) The checkout, I hate long lines.</p>
<p>7. What is most important in a supermarket for you?</p> <p>a) Close to my house. b) Cheap prices. c) Items are easy to find, logical layout. d) Size and selection.</p>	<p>8. Do you plan what treats you will buy?</p> <p>a) Nope, I just pick what looks good. b) I do, but I often change my mind at the store. c) I write the treats I want on my list. d) I usually don't buy treats.</p>
<p>9. Do you always use a trolley or a basket?</p> <p>a) I just grab what I can carry. b) I prefer baskets, faster and less tempted to buy more things. c) Most of the time, yes. d) I always use a trolley, I need the extra space.</p>	<p>10. Do you often buy the same brands and products over and over?</p> <p>a) No, I like to try new things every week. b) I don't usually buy the same product if another one is cheaper. c) I usually buy the same products, but I might try different brands if they look nice. d) Yes, I know what I like and don't see why I should change.</p>

 4. Add up your points (A = 1, B = 2, C = 3, D = 4), then check your total to see what kind of shopper you are and discuss with a partner.

10–18 points: The impulse shopper

You want groceries with no fuss, and believe that shopping can be a fun and spontaneous experience. You don't really plan your groceries, and often find yourself popping into your local supermarket a few times a week when you realise you've run out of something. You like buying products that are fun and colourful, and you prioritize convenience over everything else.



19–25 points: The Bargain Hunter

You love sales, promotions, and coupons. Your main goal at the supermarket is to spend as little money as possible. A good bargain hunter needs to be flexible, so although you do some planning, you often ignore your shopping list if you find a good sale. More often than not, you shop for staples such as milk or eggs, and are not really affected by marketing or packaging.



26–33 points: The Balanced Shopper

You're an experienced shopper, and you definitely have a routine, but you're fine with some impulse buys or picking up a quick treat if you're in the mood. You want a smooth and stress-free shopping experience, and you like it if a supermarket has some high-quality goods, such as some nice (but expensive) cheese in the dairy section, or some freshly baked pastries in the baked goods aisle.



34–40 points: The Planner

You approach grocery shopping with military efficiency. Lists, meal plans, and efficient trips are your style. You are aware of how time-consuming grocery shopping can be if you let it, and you want to spend as little time each week in the supermarket as possible. You don't even think about making impulse purchases, you are too focused on getting what you need and getting out! You like the aisles of your supermarket to be clean, large, and well-stocked, and you expect the cashier to be fast and competent.



Do you think your shopper profile is accurate? Why or why not?



5. You are going to watch a video about supermarket design. Try to predict what the answers are for the questions below with a partner before you watch the video. Use some of the phrases in the box to make your predictions if you want.

Honestly, I have no idea	It's a wild guess, but maybe...	I guess it's possible that...
It might be that...	I think it's because...	That's probably because...
I'm almost certain that's...	That's definitely because...	I know this, it's because...

- a) In what decade did the modern grocery store (picking up your own groceries instead of pointing to what you want from behind a counter) first appear? *1916 (so the 1910s)*
- b) Why are fruit and flowers always at the front of a supermarket? *Because they are the first thing you see, and they convey an idea of freshness.*
- c) In what section of a supermarket is targeted lighting particularly important? *Fruit and vegetables because it makes the fruit and vegetables look better*
- d) Why are milk and bread always at the back of a supermarket? *To make you walk through the rest of the store so you're more likely to make impulse buys.*
- e) Supermarkets make 50-75% of their profit from 'slotting fees'. What do you think a slotting fee is? *Fees that food brands pay the companies so they can have their products on the best shelves.*
- f) What is the "golden zone" in supermarkets, and why is it different in the cereal aisle? *It's the eye level zone on shelves, it's different in cereal aisles because children are more interested in cereal, therefore the zone is lower.*
- g) Why do supermarkets need to know the average height of the local population? *Because it helps them understand what "the golden zone" is for each area.*
- h) Why are products with higher profit margins usually placed on the right-hand side of the aisle? *Because right-handed people are more likely to notice and pick up items on their right.*
- i) Why do some supermarkets have several different types of floor tiles? *Because some tiles are used to slow down trolleys next to products with higher profit margins.*
- j) Why do some supermarkets deliberately understaff their checkouts? *To make people wait longer so they are more likely to make an impulse buy.*



6. The video contains the following information. Complete the sentences with the words.

retail	margins	grid	manipulation
likelihood	real estate	coincidence	maze

- a) They're not in the food business, they're in the *real estate* business.
- b) The profit *margins* for most grocery stores are quite thin.
- c) One of the most common supermarket layouts is the *grid*.
- d) The *manipulation* starts the second you step inside the supermarket.
- e) It's not a *coincidence* that fruit and vegetables are always at the front of the shop.
- f) This tactic is designed to increase the *likelihood* of impulse buys along the way.
- g) Some supermarkets are designed like a *maze* to make you spend as much time there as possible.
- h) *Retail* is a very competitive industry, especially with the rise of online shopping.



7. Watch the video while writing down the real answers for the questions in exercise 5.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)
- f)
- g)
- h)
- i)
- j)



How many answers did you correctly predict for the questions in exercise 5? Which did you find most surprising?