

Première partie de l'épreuve**How artificial intelligence may be making you buy things**

The shopping lists we used to scribble on the back of an envelope are increasingly already known by the supermarkets we frequent.

Firstly via the loyalty cards we scan at checkouts and more and more so from our online baskets, our shopping habits are no longer a secret.

- 5 But now more retailers are using AI (artificial intelligence) – software systems that can learn for themselves – to try to automatically predict and encourage our very specific preferences and purchases like never before.

Retail consultant of Blick Rothenberg, calls this "the holy grail... to build up a profile of customers and suggest a product before they realise it is what they wanted".

- 10 So the next time you dash into your local shop to buy certain snacks and a particular wine on a Friday night, perhaps you can blame AI, and a computer that has learned all about you, for the decision.

- 15 The founder of Ubamarket, a UK firm that makes a shopping app that allows people to pay for items via their phones, make lists, and scan products for ingredients and allergens.

"Our AI system tracks people's behaviour patterns rather than their purchases, and the more you shop the more the AI knows about what kinds of products you like," he says.

- 20 "The AI module is designed not only to do the obvious stuff, but it learns as it goes along and becomes anticipatory. It can start to build a picture of how likely you are to try a different brand, or to buy chocolate on a Saturday."

And it can offer what he calls "hyper-personalised offers", like cheaper wine on a Friday night.

Ubamarket has struggled to persuade the UK's biggest supermarkets to adopt the app, so it has instead done deals with smaller convenience shop chains in the UK including Spar, Co-op and Budgens, stores not traditionally associated with hi-tech.

Take-up of the app remains low but it is growing, in part thanks to the coronavirus pandemic, which has made people more reluctant to touch tills or stand in queues. More than three-quarters of large retailers around the world either have AI systems now in place, or plan to install them before the end of the year, according to research group Gartner. Its analyst Sandeep Unni says the global pandemic has accelerated this trend because it has dramatically changed consumer habits.

"People panic bought, and focused on essential rather than non-essential goods, which in turn created a huge supply-demand imbalance," he says. "This meant that we saw shelves becoming empty, and demand forecasting was suddenly not working."

US firm Afresh makes AI-based supply systems for supermarkets to help best plan for what stock levels are required.

Afresh founder Matt Schwartz says that staff have to teach the AI systems about key events in the calendar, such as the recent Halloween. "Historically taking account of things like holidays has been one of the biggest challenges for AI," he says.

"And we can't fully automate away the humans. The AI may suggest 20 cases of pumpkins for October, and the humans can adjust that if they need to."

Adapted from www.bbc.com, Jane Wakefield, 9 November 2020