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## More than a place to shop

### Making the grocery store a meal destination

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# More than a place to shop

MAKING THE GROCERY STORE A MEAL DESTINATION

Shopping list —  
learning  
surprises  
experiences  
appreciation  
inspiration.

Edited by:  
Martin Moström  
Lennart Wallander  
Ulf Johansson  
Carys Egan-Wyer



# More than a place to shop

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MAKING THE GROCERY STORE A MEAL DESTINATION

EDITED BY:

MARTIN MOSTRÖM  
LENNART WALLANDER  
ULF JOHANSSON  
CARYS EGAN-WYER

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# More than a place to shop

## MAKING THE GROCERY STORE A MEAL DESTINATION

*Martin Moström, Lennart Wallander, Ulf Johansson, Carys Egan-Wyer*

The grocery retail industry is at a crossroads where traditional competitive factors such as price, assortment, and efficient distribution are no longer sufficient to secure long-term competitiveness. Today, consumers encounter experience-driven environments in other industries and increasingly expect grocery stores to offer more than just a functional transaction. At the same time, trends in health, sustainability, and digitalisation are driving new needs and behaviours that require stores to rethink their value propositions.

Theories about the experience economy, experiential marketing, and service-dominant logic emphasize that value is created in the interaction between store, suppliers, and customers, where consumption becomes an experience rather than merely a purchase situation. This raises questions about how grocery stores can position themselves as meal destinations rather than distribution channels, how insights from other industries can be transferred to grocery retail, and what role technology and supplier collaboration play in shaping a holistic experience.

This report includes a number of different chapters, each of which explores how grocery retail might address these challenges. Each chapter is written by a group of students from the master's programme in International Marketing and Brand Management (Class of 2026), who worked with the food marketing agency Foods & Friends and the shopper marketing agency SRB Retail House to find different answers to the question: How can the grocery store evolve from a functional distribution channel to an experience-based meal destination? Each chapter examines this question from a different perspective and highlights the strategic and practical implications of adopting a more experience-based business logic.

### CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In the first chapter, Boberg Kristiansen et al. examine the practical challenges of repositioning everyday grocery stores as meal destinations, framed through Pine and Gilmore's experience economy theory. Their central contribution is a staged 1-3-5-year implementation plan that moves from low-disruption meal kits to interactive open kitchens, and finally to fully embedded experiential offerings such as cooking classes and social food concepts.

In their chapter, Griffith et al. use data from grocery shoppers in Malmö to design a joint campaign based on cross-category co-creation between store and suppliers. They suggest that pairing a sensory tasting experience outside the store, with an immediate, in-store, bundled promotion can transform individual products into a complete, sensory meal solution.

Nidhi et al. tackle queuing pain points in made-to-order meal sections, asking whether technology can enhance the human meal experience. Using Osterwalder and Pigneur's value proposition framework together with smart retailing literature, they propose a three-stage technological pathway comprising ordering screens, mobile apps and robotic assistants.

In their chapter, Garfield et al. draw on Duolingo, Pokémon Go, and Starbucks to ask how gamification can shift the grocery journey from smooth to sticky. They recommend a hybrid reward system that includes a "Dinner Dilemma Solver" quest feature, and child-focused elements such as beeping scanners.

Bosdijk et al. ask how grocery retail can borrow from hospitality and sports without losing its functional core. Their proposed in-store chef battles concept was well received by consumers, though interviews revealed that the real value lay not in the competition itself but in the tastings, recipe inspiration, and human interaction surrounding it.

Bitter et al. ask how grocery retail can borrow from other industries without losing its functional role, anchoring their analysis in experiential marketing and the contrast between hedonic and utilitarian motivations. They propose two concrete innovations: (1) pop-up corners inspired by fashion retail, and (2) life-situation shelves inspired by IKEA's "Retail therapy" campaign.

Eriksoo et al. challenge the one-size-fits-all retail approach by focusing on a financially influential but underserved segment in their chapter. Namely, Swedish Baby Boomers. They propose the "Måltidsglädje" farmer's-market concept, integrated across pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase touchpoints.

In the last chapter, Albe et al. examine how self-service digital kiosks, inspired by fast-food and warehouse retail, could be adapted to the grocery context to address customer pain points without compromising the functional nature of shopping. They recommend positioning kiosks at the store entrance in larger formats to reduce navigation friction and support meal inspiration.

#### HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

You can read this report from front to back but each chapter also functions as a stand-alone case-study. While the cases apply to specific brands and categories, the findings are certainly generalisable to any store looking to become a more experience-driven environment, especially within the grocery sector. More about that in the final chapter of this report, where you will find the editors' reflections on the chapters.



## CHAPTER 1

# Transforming a grocery store into a meal destination

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## INTRODUCTION

Food structures everyday life. It shapes routines, traditions, and social interaction, yet the place where most meals begin, the grocery store, has long remained a purely functional environment. For decades, grocery retail has been designed around goods and services, prioritising efficiency over engagement (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). This logic has shaped how consumers experience grocery shopping, which is often perceived as routine rather than engaging, with 80 percent of customers describing grocery shopping as boring (Moström, 2025). However, this approach is increasingly being challenged.

In today's retail landscape, goods and services alone are no longer sufficient to create value. Instead, value creation depends on engaging customers through experiences rather than transactions (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). As competition intensifies, grocery retailers are under pressure to differentiate themselves by offering something beyond traditional retailing. One emerging response is the hybridization of grocery retail, where stores integrate elements commonly associated with restaurants (Ham et al., 2021). Prepared meals, take-away options, and in-store dining blur the boundaries between grocery retail and foodservice, often referred to as the "grocerant" (Whitesp-ce, 2025).

This study focuses on the case "transforming a grocery store into a meal destination." It examines the practical challenges of repositioning everyday grocery stores from selling ingredients to offering meal solutions and experiences. This perspective is relevant as many retailers are exploring this shift but struggle to implement it in practice. The study is guided by the research question: What challenges exist when transforming a grocery store into a meal destination?

## METHOD

Given the aim of the study, a mixed-method approach was employed, where the research design is primarily qualitative in nature, with quantitative elements. This design enables the identification of patterns across the industry while also allowing for a deeper understanding of the underlying challenges.

The study adopts both a retail and a customer perspective. This dual perspective makes it possible to examine not only how transformations are implemented within retail organizations, but also how they are experienced and responded to by customers. To analyze both perspectives, the study is based on a combination of primary and secondary data.

Primary data were collected through one semi-structured interview with Per Ekstrand, a retail specialist with extensive experience in the grocery retail industry. Ekstrand has worked with several successful grocery retailers that have undergone transformations comparable to those examined in this study, making him a valuable asset to the research. The semi-structured format provided flexibility, allowing for in-depth insights beyond predefined questions while maintaining a clear structure.

In addition, the study relies on secondary data, including industry reports, trend forecasts, and expert insights from professionals and managers. The secondary data comprise both quantitative and qualitative sources, with numerical data identifying customer behavior patterns and qualitative insights explaining the underlying challenges. By combining primary and secondary data, the study ensures a well-rounded analysis, where industry expertise is complemented by broader empirical patterns and insights.

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## RESULTS

The analysis identifies four key clusters of challenges that shape the transformation of a grocery store into a meal destination, based on both customer and retailer perspectives.

From a customer perspective, grocery shopping is strongly driven by habits and routines. Customers tend to rely on familiar products, planned shopping lists, and repeated behaviours, which limits openness to new meal solutions. This habitual behaviour makes it difficult to introduce unfamiliar formats or inspire behavioural change within the store environment. In addition, grocery shopping is often conducted in a functional and time-efficient manner, leaving limited attention for inspiration. Although customers express interest in cooking and meal ideas, they rarely seek inspiration in-store, instead relying on external sources such as social media or recipe platforms.

From a retailer perspective, the findings highlight significant internal challenges. Successfully transforming into a meal destination requires a supportive organizational culture, relevant knowledge, and an entrepreneurial mindset. Retailers must identify and focus on clear unique selling points rather than attempting to implement multiple initiatives simultaneously. Furthermore, the transformation places increased demands on staffing and operations, requiring new roles, structured routines, and consistent execution of experiential elements.

Finally, the results show that transformation itself is a long-term and complex process. Rapid implementation risks overwhelming both customers and the organization, while meaningful results typically emerge over time. Overall, the findings demonstrate that both behavioural resistance and organizational constraints represent critical challenges in the shift toward meal-based grocery retailing.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the customer and retailer findings, a 1-3-5 year implementation plan is recommended. The staged approach allows retailers to gradually strengthen internal capabilities and reshape customer expectations over time, enabling both employees and customers to adapt before moving to

the next stage. The plan provides strategic direction, but each retailer must tailor the initiatives to its own strengths, customer base, and internal capabilities. It is intended to show how transformation can happen over time, not to prescribe identical solutions for all grocery formats.

Year 1 focuses on low-disruption initiatives building on existing shopping behaviors while strengthening internal capabilities. Solutions such as meal kits, ready-to-go meals, and family-oriented options extend familiar formats like delis and convenience food. Customers can adopt these meal solutions without changing established routines. Internally, change remains incremental to allow routines to stabilize.

By Year 3, increased familiarity with meal-oriented offerings enables the introduction of more interactive elements, such as an open in-store kitchen and chef-customer interaction. The focus shifts from convenience toward inspiration and guidance, while remaining accessible for mission-driven shoppers. In addition, internal roles become more specialized and visible.

In Year 5, the store should fully function as a meal destination, integrating advanced experiential elements such as cooking classes, digital pre-ordering, and social food concepts. At this stage, meal-based experiences are embedded in the store's identity, supported by organizational maturity, cultural alignment, and customer familiarity. However, these experiential elements are not introduced as a predefined concept, but emerge as the outcome of a gradual and staged transformation.

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## CHAPTER 2

## Where collaboration creates experience

## A JOINT SUPPLIER-RETAILER STRATEGY

Mia Bernadette Griffith\*, Frida Hammarlund,  
Canh Yen Nhi Tran

## I. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we focus on the supplier's role in the experience. Stepping into the shoes of retail category managers representing diverse supplier categories (dairy, fresh produce, and grocery staples), we designed a **joint campaign proposal** based on cross-category co-creation between the store and its suppliers. This angle is relevant because suppliers are traditionally excluded from the final customer interaction phase, losing control once products hit the shelf. Our angle breaks this down by uniting complementary suppliers with retailers in a cohesive, multi-sensory campaign. By using a Food Truck as a joint sensory tasting experience outside the store, paired with an immediate, in-store bundled promotion, we transform individual products into a complete sensory meal solution.

**Research Question:** *How can suppliers and retailers co-create meal-based experiences that enhance shopper engagement across the entire path to purchase?* This report translates our findings into a practical campaign proposal, demonstrating how category managers can leverage value networks and co-creation to engage shoppers and drive mutual profitability.

## II. METHOD

To thoroughly understand the interplay between suppliers, stores, and shoppers, we utilized a **qualitative research approach** designed to capture both real-world constraints and consumer desires. Our data collection consisted of two main components:

1. **Consumer Questionnaires:** We gathered qualitative data from 10 regular grocery shoppers residing in Malmö, Sweden. The sample was evenly split between males and females, ranging in age from 28 to 86, and included both Swedish and international residents. Open-ended questions were used to

explore shopping behaviour, understand their pain points, meal inspiration, and reactions to the proposed concept.

2. **Industry Expert Interviews:** We conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with two retail experts (including a veteran with over 30 years of retail experience) and two senior supplier representatives (from Arla Foods and Skånemejerier). These respondents were purposely selected based on their professional experience in category management and shopper marketing, ensuring relevant and practice-oriented insights.

This dual approach allowed us to contrast consumer enthusiasm with the practical, operational realities of retail logistics, hygiene regulations, and promotional budgets. All interviews were transcribed, translated, and thematically analyzed to build a viable implementation model for practitioners. Moreover, industry reports were also used to inform both the design of the data collection and the interpretation of the findings.

## III. RESULTS

Our analysis revealed a strong appetite for inspiration, heavily balanced by a need for seamless practical execution.

- **The Shopper:** 80% of surveyed consumers cited price as a top decision-making factor, and 90% currently get their meal inspiration from online sources rather than inside the store. However, the offline potential is massive: **80% expressed strong interest in stopping at a food truck for a tasting**, and 90% stated they would purchase the ingredients if they were conveniently bundled together inside. **Convenience and time-saving** were major drivers for 90% of respondents.
- **The Retailer:** Retail experts saw the concept as innovative and capable of driving traffic,

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but some operational bottlenecks need to be carefully managed. They stressed that the initiative **must be fully managed externally** to avoid burdening the store and the concept is best suited for large-format stores (like ICA MAXI) that have the necessary outdoor space.

- **The Supplier:** Suppliers are enthusiastic and see the food truck as a perfect use for their

event budgets to drive product trials. However, they emphasized that **collaboration across complementary categories is essential**, and the physical distance from the truck to the product must be zero-friction. The incentive must be immediate and clear.

| Theme                                     | %  | Key Insight                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Price mentioned as a top factor           | 80 | Although other aspects were mentioned, price was consistently a factor throughout, particularly for families. |
| Online meal inspiration source            | 90 | Social media, websites, apps, etc. over in-store.                                                             |
| Interest in food truck tastings           | 80 | Yes (4), Conditional Yes (4), most contain conditions - e.g. Suitable for allergies, healthy and convenient.  |
| Would like ingredients after tasting      | 80 | Yes, although, this is often dependent on the price of the ingredients in store + healthiness of produce.     |
| Would like bundled ingredients            | 90 | Yes (6), Conditional Yes (3), depending on price, health, type of meal.                                       |
| Interest in Sustainability/Origin         | 50 | High influence (5), Moderate influence (3) - matters sometimes for selected produce (meat/fish).              |
| Likes seasonal themes                     | 80 | Mostly mention seasonal weather, holiday relevance, freshness and produce availability.                       |
| Printed & QR recipe                       | 70 | Printed (5), QR (3), Both acceptable (2) varies on age and practicality.                                      |
| Low involvement in weekly theme decisions | 50 | Store (5), Conditional voting (3), Fully voting (1).                                                          |

Figure 1: Summary of shopper key insights.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

To successfully co-create a profitable meal experience, we recommend the following 5 practitioner actions:

1. **Implement an 'Outdoor-In' Sensory Trigger:** Place a branded food truck adjacent to the store entrance. This inspires shoppers before they enter the store, saving valuable shelf space while actively driving traffic.
2. **Design an Immediate In-Store Bundle:** Once inspired, shoppers must find a 'bundle section' right at the entrance. Group all ingredients from the food truck recipe together and offer a bundle discount to satisfy highly price-sensitive consumers.

3. **Bridge the Digital-Physical Gap:** Provide recipes in both digital (QR code linked to the retailer app) and physical (printed brochures) formats. This ensures inclusivity for older shoppers who avoid QR codes, while capturing digital engagement from younger demographics.
4. **Share Costs via Multi-Supplier Co-creation:** Lower financial barriers by featuring a 'hero' supplier who shares the spotlight and costs with 2-3 complementary lower-tier suppliers (e.g., pasta paired with cheese and tomatoes).
5. **Outsource Operations:** Do not burden store staff. Retailers should mandate that food truck logistics, staffing, and HACCP hygiene compliance are managed entirely by a third-party retail service company or a large anchor supplier.



Figure 2: Example of thematic week with 'hero' product (AI generated - Gemini).



**ORDER  
HERE**

## CHAPTER 3

# From grocery run to meal destination

### TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY PATHWAY FOR SWEDISH RETAILERS

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Shifting consumer trends, rapid technological change, and environmental pressures have transformed grocery retail. At the same time, advances in data collection and technology have made consumers more susceptible to marketing across the entire purchase journey, enabling retailers to adopt increasingly customer-centric approaches. While automation is widely implemented to improve experience and financial performance, technology alone is insufficient and can, if poorly executed, create frustration compared to human interaction (McKinsey, 2020).

Drawing on Osterwalder and Pigneur's (2010) value proposition framework, this study focuses on key customer pain points. Queuing remains the most significant, affecting 60% of consumers (Capgemini Research Institute, 2019). Although self-checkouts have reduced queues in some areas, Made-To-Order (MTO) meal sections remain highly affected. As demand shifts toward convenience and out-of-home food options (Griffith et al., 2022), grocery retailers are well positioned to capitalize.

This paper therefore examines how automation technology can address queuing in MTO sections, asking:

- *Can technology replace, or only enhance, the human and sensory aspects of the in-store meal experience?*

#### 2. METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-explanatory qualitative design, utilizing both primary and secondary data to compare consumer experiences with industry trends, and to facilitate an in-depth interpretation of shopper behaviours. Primary data was collected through purposive sampling to ensure participants provided deep insights into their meal shopping experience and attitudes toward in-store automation technologies. The sample included five Swedish consumers in which three Generation-Z

shoppers, selected for their technological proficiency and market influence, and two retail industry professionals. The data was gathered via semi-structured interviews lasting 30 to 45 minutes, and these sessions were guided by three themes:

- The appeal of smart retailing
- Perceived benefits of smart retailing
- Consumer beliefs, concerns, and acceptance factors related to smart retailing

The questionnaire was designed based on an existing survey about smart stores (Capgemini Research Institute, 2019). To minimize misinterpretation and stimulate specific feedback, the interview incorporated practical scenarios and examples involving technologies such as ordering screens, mobile apps, and robotic assistants.

Secondary data was collected to establish industry context and explore the strategic drivers behind retail automation. This involved analyzing online surveys and reports from major consulting firms and global retailers regarding automation trends. By integrating these sources, the study clarifies the alignment between consumer expectations and current retail strategies.

Finally, all data was analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved an iterative process of coding and theme development to identify patterns across both primary and secondary sources, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how technology transforms the shopping journey.

#### 3. RESULTS

Through interviews with ordinary consumers and experts in the retail sector, we discovered that the main pain point for MTO meal sections is the queuing issue. The respondents stated that if the queuing time was too long, they would give up making the purchase. Other issues include the lack of transparency regarding food ingredients, allergens, and nutritional content. Customized meals cannot

be personalized. The payment process in the store is quite complicated. The issues such as food waste were also mentioned. We have proposed three solutions.

The first option is the self-service kiosk solution. Although some participants indicated that they preferred interacting with real people. However, they also acknowledged that the self-service kiosk can alleviate the queue pressure during peak hours. In addition, this facility sends a signal that the supermarket values its catering services. Information about ingredients, allergens and nutritional content is displayed on the screen to meet the requirements of transparency and customization (figure 1).



Figure 1: Self-service kiosks example (AI-generated).

The second solution is the service of placing an order online and then picking up the food from the delivery cabinet. Mainly addresses the issue of

queuing and the cumbersome in-store payment process. Customers expect an on-demand pick-up experience. This can eliminate the need for queuing and cumbersome payment procedures. The purchase selection interface will address the transparency issue through component filtering and fulfill customized requirements (figure 2).

The third technological solution involves the addition of robotic arms. The use of robotic arms to prepare food may reduce people's trust in the quality of the food, but it can enhance the freshness. If the robotic arm is used to assist real chefs, it will be more readily accepted. The ordering system is combined with the first two schemes. This model is

more popular when deployed in non-store areas with high foot traffic than when deployed within the store. However, as customers visit repeatedly, the novelty will gradually fade away (figure 3).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, we recommend retail stores to apply these three technological solutions gradually as a strategic pathway to transform the industry, shifting from a merely functional grocery store to a technologically augmented meal-destination store. The implementation may follow these stages: beginning with placing self-order screens in the MTO area

and enhancing the retail store's mobile application experience, subsequently deploying a hybrid robotic arm in the grocery store's MTO meal area, and

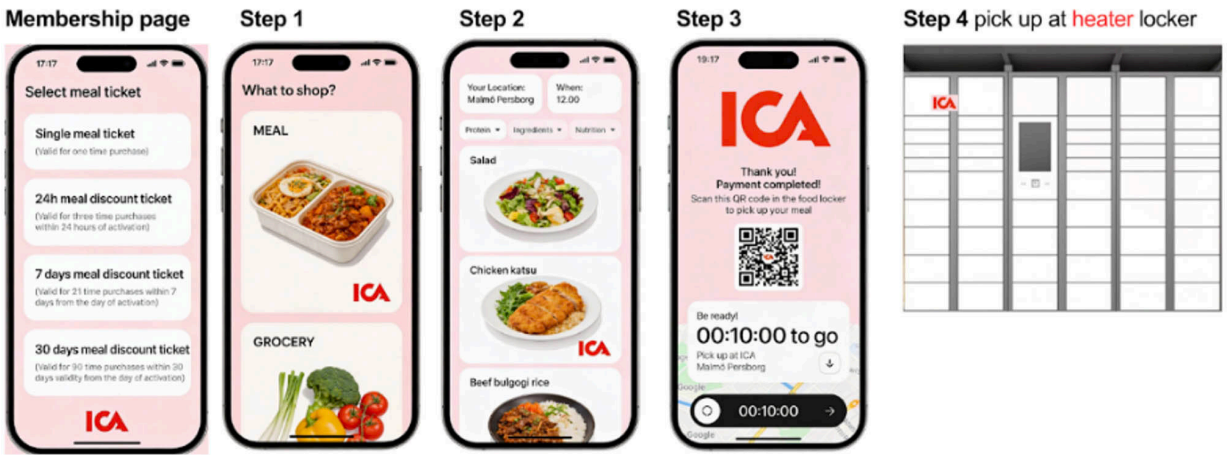


Figure 2: Online application example (AI-generated).



Figure 3: Hybrid robotic arm example (AI-generated).

eventually developing a Grab-and-Go Convenience Store by combining robotic automation and human elements in strategic high-traffic locations such as office lobbies, university campuses, and train station halls.

These solutions will not only solve the shoppers' pain points surrounding queuing, food transparency, and convenience, but also unlock more revenue streams through omni-channel retailing, where technology is used to enrich rather than replace the interaction with customers. By doing so, retailers can deliver sensory stimulation and more personalized service experiences that particularly value busy shoppers, most notably Generation Z, whose spending power and digital fluency make them a critical consumer segment to capture. Even more, these technological solutions are friendly for late Generation Y or millennials and definitely the future market which is Generation Alpha.

However, retailers must remain cautious. Consumer trust, data privacy, and the perceived quality of food prepared with automation are inevitable barriers. Accordingly, the hybrid model, which positions technology as an assistant to human staff rather than a replacement, is the most viable and consumer-accepted approach in the current Swedish market. Therefore, we suggest further quantitative and qualitative market research alongside A/B testing to validate more representative data in response to these technological solutions before committing to full-scale implementation.

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## CHAPTER 4

# From boring to exciting

### GAMIFYING THE GROCERY CUSTOMER JOURNEY THROUGH CROSS-INDUSTRY INSPIRATION

*Mallory Garfield, Linnéa Håkansson, Mawj Ahmed Mahmood,  
Simon Schmidt, Lucie Secretin, Liam Sjunnesson*

#### INTRODUCTION

While grocery shopping is an essential routine, consumers frequently describe it as a “chore” that is boring, uninspiring, and low in emotional value. Currently, retailers primarily differentiate through price, promotion, and functionality, making stores distribution points rather than destinations. This report explores inspiration through cross-industry comparisons, examining how grocery retail can evolve by learning from sectors such as education, entertainment, and food and beverage.

This specific angle investigates how gamification elements, the use of game design in non-game contexts, can be transferred from industries like education (Duolingo), entertainment (Pokémon Go), and food and beverage (Starbucks) to enhance the grocery experience. By drawing inspiration from successful gamified platforms such as Duolingo, Pokémon Go, and Starbucks, this study explores how to shift the customer journey from a “smooth,” functional routine focused on efficiency to a “sticky,” immersive experience characterized by engagement and unpredictability. This approach offers a low-risk strategy to increase dwell time and emotional loyalty by transforming the grocery experience from purely functional and efficient to immersive and experiential. These shifting factors in grocery retail shopping open up to our research question:

**RQ:** Can grocery retail learn from other industries without losing its functional role?

The report aims to illustrate how integrating elements like quests and progress bars can foster emotional loyalty and increase dwell time, provided these features function as a complementary layer that does not disrupt the essential speed and simplicity shoppers require.

#### METHODOLOGY

To investigate the potential to bridge the functional grocery landscape through modern gamification,

this study adopted a qualitative abductive research design. Primary data was collected through 14 semi-structured interviews, ensuring a broad range of insights. The data collection involved two distinct streams: 12 customer interviews and two expert interviews with a Digital Journey Expert and a Grocery & Retail Developer. To minimize bias and collect tangible data on actual past behaviors rather than hypothetical opinions, the customer interviews were guided by “The Mom Test.” These participants represented various age groups and household types, all shopping within the Swedish market.

The expert interviews used the Expert Stakeholder Interview method to gather insights into internal buying habits and strategic innovation goals. Following the collection of this rich data, thematic analysis was employed to code the material and identify recurring patterns across both customer and expert responses. This method provided a structured analysis of perceptions regarding boredom, smartphone usage, and the feasibility of gamified features in a retail setting.

#### RESULTS

The analysis indicates that implementing gamification in grocery retail is feasible only when it functions as a complementary add-on to the store’s current loyalty program. Experts identified three critical themes for successful implementation: price reduction as the primary incentive, the need to maintain in-store efficiency, and the “don’t mess with the customer” rule regarding physical store structure. In a price-sensitive context like grocery shopping, monetary benefits are the primary motivator for engagement, as symbolic rewards like badges are insufficient for initial attraction. Furthermore, gamification must not hinder efficiency; if an app feels like another “chore,” users will disengage. Practitioners must also avoid disrupting established physical routes and routines, as altering the “logical move” around the shop can be frustrating. Customer data confirmed that while the experience is

often viewed as a “chore,” shoppers are already “hybrid actors” who use smartphones for lists, music, and discount checks. Most customers are open to gamification provided it stays simple and offers tangible rewards. Notably, specific segments, such as parents shopping with children, saw high potential in gamified elements like scanners that “beep” to keep children entertained.

moments; for example, an optional “Quest Mode” featuring a “Dinner Dilemma Solver” can turn the tedious cognitive load of meal planning into a fun culinary quest. Finally, practitioners should target specific segments, such as parents, by providing gamified elements for children, such as digital scanners that “beep” or in-store activities that lead to badges at home, thereby reducing the stress of the

Table 1: Key themes from expert interviews.

| Key Theme       | Practitioner Requirement                                                          |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Price Reduction | Must provide clear monetary benefits (discounts/coupons) to ensure engagement.    |
| Efficiency      | Features must not slow or complicate the shopping journey.                        |
| Physical Logic  | Implementation must not disrupt established routes or the store’s “logical move.” |

Table 2: Customer perspectives and smartphone usage.

| Category              | Summary of Interview Findings                                                      |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| General Perception    | Viewed as a “chore,” “task,” or “obligation.”                                      |
| Smartphone Role       | Used for Notes (lists), music, and checking discounts.                             |
| Gamification Feedback | 8 out of 12 customers are open to it if it simplifies the trip and offers rewards. |

RECOMMENDATIONS

To successfully implement gamification in a grocery retail setting, we recommend five specific strategies. First, practitioners should implement a hybrid engagement layer on smartphones via an opt-in model that allows customers to toggle between a “smooth”, efficient journey and a “sticky”, exploratory one. Second, the reward system must bridge the gap between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation by starting with extrinsic rewards (tangible discounts) to trigger initial engagement, then introducing intrinsic motivators like streaks and badges to foster emotional brand-building. Third, retailers should use moment-based augmented reality (AR) for short interactions in low-traffic areas, such as seasonal aisles, to ensure engagement does not block high-traffic flow or disrupt the store’s physical layout. Fourth, gamification should be used to transform existing pain points into discovery

shopping trip and encouraging store loyalty. These recommendations offer a low-risk strategy to increase dwell time and emotional loyalty without compromising the store’s functional role.

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## CHAPTER 5

# Inspiration through cross-industry comparison

## IN-STORE CHEF BATTLES

*Ayomi Bosdijk, Hanny Landgren, Julia Wadström,  
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### INTRODUCTION

This project focused on the inspiration through cross-industry comparison in grocery retail. Our angle was how grocery retailers can integrate experience-based concepts from hospitality and sport industries without compromising their core role of delivering an efficient, practical, and convenient shopping experience. This angle is relevant because grocery shopping is still seen as a routine, uninspiring task, while physical retailers face increasing pressure to differentiate from online competitors. The case was chosen because grocery retail faces a strategic tension. Stores must stay functional and efficient, yet consumers increasingly seek inspiration, engagement, and social value in physical shopping. Research shows many consumers find grocery shopping boring, while some return to stores for inspiration and human interaction. This suggests stores can no longer compete only on price and assortment.

Our purpose was to explore how grocery retailers can create more engaging in-store experiences by borrowing ideas from industries that are strong in customer experience. Hospitality contributes welcome, service, and personal interaction, while sports adds excitement, tension, and community. The guiding research question for the project was:

*How can grocery retail integrate experience-based concepts from hospitality and sports industries without losing its core functional role?*

To answer this, we used Servicescape Theory and Grewal's 5Es framework to analyze how experiential concepts can be introduced to support, rather than disrupt the grocery shopping journey.

### METHOD

The study used a qualitative exploratory design with primary and secondary data. The goal was to understand how consumers and grocery store managers perceive the current shopping experience

and respond to possible cross-industry concepts. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with two stakeholder groups:

- 3 store managers with operational or strategic store responsibility
- 14 consumers with variation in age, household type, and shopping habits

The interviews were conducted digitally and lasted 10 to 30 minutes. The semi-structured format allowed comparison of responses and deeper probing into individual experiences. The interview guide covered five themes; customer journey and pain points, servicescape, inspiration and experiences, cross-industry inspiration, and reactions to the proposed idea.

Secondary data included industry and consumer reports, plus academic literature on retail, service environments, customer experience, and cross-industry innovation. These sources helped contextualize interview findings and strengthen the analysis. The analysis used a thematic approach. Interview transcripts were read multiple times, then coded and grouped into themes. Theoretical frameworks served as analytical tools rather than strict coding templates. This allowed combining empirical insights with theory abductively. To ensure quality, researchers coded independently and compared interpretations before finalizing themes.

### RESULTS

Analysis showed that grocery shopping is still primarily experienced as a task-oriented and efficiency-driven activity. Consumers value clear layouts, easy navigation, product availability, and fast checkout. The store environment is largely perceived as functional rather than inspiring.

At the same time, findings show room for more experience-based value, especially when subtle, optional, and supportive. Consumers were particularly positive toward:

- Food tastings
- Recipe inspiration
- Welcoming and helpful staff
- Occasional engaging events that break the routine

A central finding was the distinction between two broad shopper modes:

- Mission-driven shoppers, who want speed and control
- Experience-seeking shoppers, who are more open to browsing, inspiration, and interaction

Results showed the current servicescape often works as a hygiene factor but rarely creates emotional engagement. Poor signage, crowding, moved products, and blocked flow caused frustration and reduced willingness to explore.

Cross-industry inspiration was viewed positively when adapted carefully. From hospitality, consumers valued friendliness, warmth, and approachable staff. From sports, they liked occasional playful or competitive elements, but not if too loud, crowded, or disruptive.

The proposed concept, Chef Battle, received generally positive reactions. The strongest value was not the competition itself, but the tasting, inspiration, and recipe support linked to it. Respondents saw potential in the concept as an occasional in-store experience, as long as it stayed optional and did not interfere with everyday shopping flow.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, we propose the following recommendations for grocery retailers:

### 1. Introduce low-disruption experiential events

Use occasional in-store concepts like cooking battles, tastings, or themed demonstrations to create excitement and break routine. Limit their frequency and keep them optional.

### 2. Prioritize inspiration that supports decision-making

Consumers want practical help more than entertainment alone. Recipe cards, meal suggestions, product combinations, and tasting stations add value without overwhelming the shopping trip.

### 3. Use hospitality principles to strengthen service encounters

Train staff to be more approachable, welcoming, and helpful. Small improvements in friendliness and attentiveness make the store feel more human without major structural changes.

### 4. Protect the store's functional core

Any experiential concept must be designed for efficiency. Events should not block aisles, create noise, or interfere with core customer flow. Functional shopping must remain the foundation.

### 5. Treat experiential retail as a strategic differentiator

Retailers should not see experience as a gimmick but as a way to create loyalty, emotional connection, and relevance against online channels. Well-

designed experiences strengthen brand perception and repeat visits.



Figure 1: Mockup of Chef Battles in Store.

## CHAPTER 6

## Rethinking grocery retail

## EXPERIENCE-DRIVEN IDEAS FROM OTHER INDUSTRIES

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## INTRODUCTION

Why always develop completely new innovations when there is already something in another industry that works?

To transform grocery shopping into a more experiential activity, we present innovations inspired from two different industries and apply them to the grocery retail context.

By examining grocery shopping through the lens of experiential marketing, alongside utilitarian and hedonic motivational orientation, we investigated the functionality of both innovations based on the following question: “In which way can grocery retail learn from other industries without losing its functional role?” As a result, we propose and recommend two innovations.

## Pop-up corners:

The first innovation is inspired by the fashion industry. The idea behind pop-up corners is to create a branded space within the grocery store (3x3m), rented by brands for one to two weeks. Brands are free to choose their own design (e.g., displays,

sampling, storytelling), while all sales still go through the supermarket checkout. By implementing a pop-up corner, retailers can enrich the overall in-store experience.

## Life-situation shelves:

The second innovation is inspired by the home décor industry, more precisely by IKEA’s “Retail therapy” campaign. Alongside the standard store layout, one shelf or aisle, depending on the store size, are reframed around real-life situations. Each life-situation shelf contains ready-to-cook meal packages including a recipe card. A limited range of options within each situation (e.g., dietary preferences, family-sized) keeps the choice manageable. Clear, user-friendly signage uses everyday language to guide shoppers. Life-situations themes rotate bi-weekly to encourage the discovery of new ideas over time.



Figure 1: Lindt Pop-up corner (OpenAI, 2023).



Figure 2: Life-situation shelves (OpenAI, 2023).

## METHOD

We used a qualitative, cross-sectional design (Bryman & Bell, 2011) to explore how Swedish grocery retailers could introduce more experience-driven in-store ideas without weakening the supermarket's functional role. Rather than measuring long-term behavioral change, we aimed to capture how shoppers and retail professionals currently react to such concepts.

Two types of data were collected. First, desk research was carried out across industries where experiential formats are more established in order to identify ideas that might be transferable to grocery retail. This informed the development of two concepts for testing: pop-up corners, and life-situation shelves with ready-to-cook meal solutions.

Second, primary qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. A total of 20 consumers aged 16-74 were interviewed outside supermarkets in Lund and Malmö, mainly at ICA Malmborgs and Coop, with participants recruited on site using convenience sampling. The interviews explored shopping habits, store choice, and reactions to the two concepts. To complement the shopper perspective, four retail experts were also interviewed, including an Experience & Insights Retail Developer, and a Marketing Activation Manager. This triangulation helped us assess the concepts from consumer, operational, and commercial perspectives.

All interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed manually. The material was analyzed using thematic analysis. Initial codes of repeated interview responses, including inspiration, enjoyment, disruption, convenience, speed, and ease of shopping were grouped into broader categories of value, friction, and feasibility. Finally, we consolidated these categories into overarching themes, particularly the contrast between hedonic motivations, such as inspiration and discovery, and utilitarian motivations, such as convenience and task completion, which informed the practical recommendations.

## RESULTS

Emotional value has become increasingly important for grocery shoppers because it lasts and creates loyalty and differentiation for the retailer. Pop-up corners evoked emotional responses from the shop-

pers as they perceived them as a fun and exciting idea that they would like to see during their shopping experience. Life situation shelves, by contrast, were perceived as a stress-relief idea by reducing the effort required to decide what to buy.

At the same time, functionality remains the main driver of shopping decisions. Several respondents expressed limited interest in pop-up corners because shoppers primarily expect retail innovations to make grocery shopping easier and more affordable, which is not the main objective of pop-up corners. Meanwhile, life situation shelves received an extremely positive reaction from many shoppers as they offer exactly what shoppers are looking for: convenience.

Our findings also show that shoppers were generally open to both ideas but framed them as nice-to-have additions rather than reasons to change where they shop. Several respondents stressed that such concepts must not be too large or disruptive, compromising store navigability.

Industry experts consider both concepts operationally realistic mainly in larger supermarkets and hypermarkets, provided that space, staffing, and brand collaborations are carefully planned. For pop-up corners, limited floor space was seen as the main barrier in smaller store formats. Regarding life-situation shelves, experts noted that quicker, more targeted trips could reduce cross-category browsing and therefore affect sales elsewhere in the store.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The results suggest that experiential elements can enrich the in-store journey while preserving what grocery retail fundamentally needs to be when designed in alignment with shoppers' situational motivations and functional expectations. Based on the findings, we recommend the following:

### 1. Use pop-up corners as a selective, non-invasive format.

Consistent with servicecape research (Bitner, 1992), they should add novelty and discovery without interrupting the main shopping flow. Additionally, installing them on weekdays allows activation to capture two consecutive weekends, while higher-engagement weekend activities (e.g., sampling, demonstrations) can encourage browsing.

## **2. Prioritize pop-up corners in larger store formats.**

They are most commercially and operationally viable in larger supermarkets and hypermarkets where space is available.

## **3. Build strong brand partnerships for pop-up execution.**

Retailers should rely on brands to support staffing, activation, and administration so that the concept does not create additional friction.

## **4. Position life-situation shelves as convenience-led inspiration.**

These shelves should help shoppers complete tasks more easily while also offering meal inspiration.

## **5. Keep life-situation shelves simple and dynamic.**

Short recipe cards, limited options within each theme (e.g., dietary preferences, family sizes), and bi-weekly rotation can keep the concept useful without overwhelming shoppers.

Taken together, both innovations can enhance the in-store journey by adding experiential value, but only if they remain subordinate to grocery retail's functional core. Since grocery shopping is primarily task-oriented and store choice is driven by proximity, price, and assortment, experiential elements must never compromise layout, navigability or price clarity.

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## CHAPTER 7

# The future of grocery retail

## CREATING AN EXPERIENCE-BASED FOOD DESTINATION FOR BABY BOOMERS?

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### INTRODUCTION

This report investigates the meal experience for the customer of the future with the aim to connect the evolving trends to future target groups in retailing. Through the evaluation of the store as an experience landscape and applying segmentation theories, we aimed to challenge the “one-fits-all” approach of retailers to uncover new strategies for store development. By investigating the segment of Baby Boomers, we aimed to put the importance of the physical store into perspective and reflect on ideas, how its purpose can be extended beyond utility functions.

Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) represent a substantial and strategically important segment within the Swedish market as this generation has maintained strong financial stability and frequently spends more than other age groups (Nets, 2023; Parment, 2013). Given their significant economic influence and distinct preferences, this report aims to answer the research question: “How can retailers create a long-lasting experience-based food destination for Baby Boomers in Sweden?” The study addresses this question by analysing the specific behaviour, needs and expectations of Baby Boomers, resulting in a retail experience proposal tailored to the target group.

### METHOD

For this study, data from three complementary data streams were collected to present nuanced findings on the Swedish Baby Boomer grocery retail experience. Consumer interviews, an industry expert interview and secondary market data were combined through triangulation, with the goal to identify overarching behavioural patterns.

Qualitative primary data was gathered through ten semi-structured interviews with Swedish Baby Boomers, recruited through extended social networks using convenience sampling. This approach enabled open discussions about shopping habits, food pre-

ferences and spending behaviour. Each interview lasted between 20 and 35 minutes and they were thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns.

The consumer insights were validated through an in-depth interview with Per Ekstrand, who is an industry expert on grocery store design. The sampling strategy for this interview was purposive sampling. During this conversation potential store design approaches were evaluated to explore limiting factors and drivers of success, before developing a store concept.

The third data stream on which the presented results and recommendations are based is published sector reports from McKinsey, BCG and ICA Gruppens 2022 consumer study on grocery retail. These were collected through extensive research and provided us with quantitative support for our qualitative primary data.

### RESULTS

The Swedish Baby Boomer grocery experience is driven by a blend of loyalty, efficiency, and psychological fulfillment. This generation prioritises convenience and layout familiarity, thus, frequent rearrangements diminish their sense of autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Beyond a pleasant walk-around to slow the in-store pace (Ekstrand, 2025), designer Klara Persson (ICA Gruppen, 2022) underscores the importance of soft qualities, creating calmness through sensory elements like varying materials, lighting, and noise. A tidy, aesthetic environment further supports passive immersion and an enjoyable atmosphere (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

Product preferences focus on freshness, health, and local sourcing. While demand for transparent, locally produced goods is high, they remain difficult to access in standard retail formats. Additionally, over-the-counter services and food tastings are highly valued for transforming a routine chore into an entertaining and social event.

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A significant gap remains in staff competence. Baby Boomers seek knowledgeable, non-transactional interactions to satisfy needs for relatedness and education regarding healthy choices. The interviewees conclude that they seldom derive inspiration from their in-store experience, indicating room for the retailer to enhance the creative in-store cooking stimulation for the customers. Additionally, while quality is crucial, price sensitivity persists. Quality food is often perceived as exclusive, yet health is a primary trend. Therefore, retail meal-experiences must prioritise inclusivity and availability for all.

Ultimately, retailers can foster intrinsic motivation through a fresh first encounter, utilising staff and farmers as expert guides. By addressing specific needs for inspiration, education, and social connection, stores can transition from transactional spaces into long-lasting food destinations.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

To transform the grocery store to a place of experience for Baby Boomers, we propose the farmer's market concept "Måltidsglädje", integrated across the entire customer journey (Table 1&2) through the following recommendations:

#### Pre-Purchase:

- Retailers should inspire customers before store visits by providing weekly promotional leaflets that feature simple, seasonal recipes and high-light local, healthy ingredients.

#### Purchase:

- It is essential to create a cohesive in-store atmosphere. A farmers' market feel should be established from the entrance onwards through consistent design elements such as natural materials, themed shopping carts and vinyl wooden flooring. This enhances the overall experience while maintaining an efficient layout.
- As the central experience touchpoint, a farmers' market-style booth should be implemented in a dedicated area. When staffed, it should enable interaction with trained staff or local producers, offering tastings and providing knowledge on product seasonality and health benefits. To balance cost and operational efficiency, staffing should be limited to key off-peak hours relevant to Baby Boomers. Furthermore, the area should feature a rotating seasonal assortment to en-

sure variety while maintaining layout familiarity for predictability. To ensure broad applicability, the concept is scalable. While larger stores can implement the full experience, smaller stores can adopt an unmanned modular farmers shelf with seasonal products and recipe ideas.

- Additionally, retailers should extend inspiration throughout the store by integrating recipe suggestions and product pairings across different sections.

#### Post-Purchase:

- To extend customer engagement beyond the store, retailers are recommended to promote social initiatives (e.g. #måltidsglädje) on platforms like Facebook, which remains the primary social hub for Baby Boomers in Sweden.

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Table 1: Måltidsglädje Customer Journey (1)

| Customer Journey                                   | Pre Purchase                                                                      | Purchase                                                                          |                                                                                   |                                                                                   |                                                                                    |                                                                                     | Post-Purchase                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Touchpoints (own directions)                       |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |
|                                                    | Shopping planning                                                                 | Getting the shopping cart                                                         | Entering the store                                                                | Passing fruit & vegetable area                                                    | Passing the experience area, incl. Counter area                                    | Passing through Post-experience area incl. Check-out                                | Meal cooking                                                                         |
| <b>Active Absorption</b><br>(Pine & Gilmore, 1998) | Weekly leaflet: One page dedicated to seasonal offerings & recipe recommendation  |                                                                                   |                                                                                   | Signs indicating organic and health information                                   | Seasonal assortment of products<br>Recipe proposals via QR Code                    | Recipe proposals distributed throughout the store                                   |                                                                                      |
| <b>Active Immersion</b><br>(Pine & Gilmore, 1998)  |                                                                                   |                                                                                   | Visual cues to create store within a store feeling                                |                                                                                   | Specially educated staff interaction at booth during selected time periods         |                                                                                     | Facebook hashtag to encourage posting of meals<br>Reposting/shout out by supermarket |

Table 2: Måltidsglädje Customer Journey (2)

| Customer Journey                                    | Pre Purchase                                                                        | Purchase                                                                            |                                                                                     |                                                                                     |                                                                                      |                                                                                       | Post-Purchase                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Touchpoints (own deduction)                         |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|                                                     | Shopping planning                                                                   | Getting the shopping cart                                                           | Entering the store                                                                  | Passing fruit & vegetable area                                                      | Passing the experience area, incl. Counter area                                      | Passing through Post-experience area incl. Check-out                                  | Meal cooking                                                                          |
| <b>Passive Absorption</b><br>(Pine & Gilmore, 1998) | Weekly alternating recipe recommendations                                           |                                                                                     | Focal view of farmer's market booth from entry                                      |                                                                                     | Change in recipes & seasonal assortment                                              |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |
| <b>Passive Immersion</b><br>(Pine & Gilmore, 1998)  |                                                                                     | Display of „Local Matglädje“ & farmer look and feel of cart (see Appendix)          | Symbolic entry pillars into farmer's market look & feel, including flooring & sound | Use of natural fibres wherever possible                                             | Market booths (staffed & unstaffed), use of natural fibres wherever possible         |                                                                                       |                                                                                       |

## APPENDIX



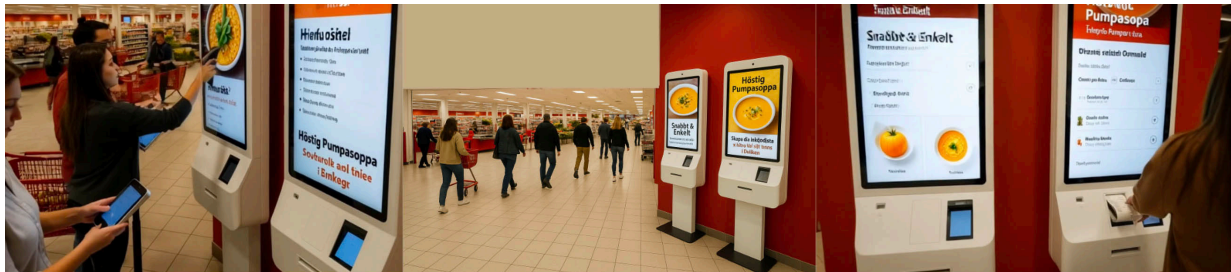
Image 1: AI-generated illustration of the "Måltidsglädje" booths (Gemini, 2025).

## CHAPTER 8

## Experiential grocery shopping

## INSPIRATION THROUGH CROSS-INDUSTRY COMPARISON

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## INTRODUCTION

The grocery retail industry is experiencing a significant transformation where advantages like low pricing, wide assortments, and a huge distribution network are not enough to satisfy today's customer expectations. This challenge is particularly evident in Sweden, where 81% of Swedish customers describe grocery shopping as boring (Wallander, 2025). However, retail literature firmly emphasizes that grocery shopping is necessity-driven and task-focused. Dissatisfaction arises from logistical friction, since shoppers seek clarity and structure in order to complete their tasks.

This study examines the implementation of self-service digital kiosks placed at grocery store entrances as a case of cross-industry inspiration. Inspired by fast-food and warehouse retail, these functions are adapted to the grocery retail context. Our specific angle focuses on "customer pains", anything that annoys the customer before, during, and after trying to solve a task, and "gain creators", which describe how products and services create customer gains (Osterwalder et al., 2014). This perspective is relevant as it transforms the 4Ps into Grewal's (2019) 5Es, specifically "experience" and "education".

The purpose is to explore how kiosks can balance "loyalty loops," which are about routine and speed, and "involvement spirals" driven by curiosity and exploration (Siebert et al., 2020). By embedding guidance and inspiration directly into the store environment, the kiosk educates shoppers without

disrupting the task-focused nature of grocery shopping. Accordingly, the paper is guided by the following research question: Can grocery retail learn from other industries without losing its functional nature?

## METHOD

With the aim of understanding how cross-industry inspired self-service digital kiosks can support grocery shopping without compromising their functional nature, this study adopts an applied research approach. Since the study examines a potential future solution rather than existing practices, the purpose of the empirical work is to explore shoppers' experiences, perceived challenges, and attitudes toward digital support. Applied research seeks to explore existing knowledge in new, practical contexts to deliver valuable insights for organizational decision-making (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Primary data were gathered through a quantitative survey conducted online and distributed to people familiar with Swedish grocery retail. The survey's overall logic was sequential: respondents were first asked to reflect on their routines and identify perceived pain points before being introduced to digital self-service kiosks and asked to evaluate them as potential solutions. This sequencing was chosen to establish perceived pain points without any solution-driven bias (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

A total of 75 respondents completed the survey. To identify dominant pain points and attitudes, quantitative responses were summarized using frequency

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distributions and percentage comparisons. The analysis was guided by relevant retail and shopper marketing literature, where patterns in the results were interpreted through the application of existing theory. While 70% of respondents were students, the data is deemed to provide a solid empirical basis for exploring cross-industry inspiration within the field of grocery retail (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

## RESULTS

The survey identifies recurring customer pains that contribute to shaping the grocery shopping experience. The most frequently mentioned challenge was “knowing what to cook” (52%), followed by “crowds” (42.7%) and “finding items in the store” (40%). These frustrations act as cumulative sources of friction that break the “loyalty loop” of routine shopping. Furthermore, more than 2/3 of respondents stated that they occasionally or often purchase products because they were included in a meal suggestion, expressing that inspiration is highly valued when supporting decision-making.

Regarding gain creation, 33.3% of respondents would like meal suggestions upon entering, while 41.3% answered “maybe”, suggesting a hesitant openness. Inspiration is highly valued when it supports decision-making without complicating the task; specifically, a majority responded positively toward inspiration for quick weekday meals (68%) and budget-friendly meals (62.7%).

When evaluating the digital kiosk concept, the feature for product location was rated most important (44%), followed by meal inspiration (18.7%). However, respondents expressed concerns about the kiosk being a time-consuming activity (64%) that is complicated to use (36%). These results reveal that pain-relieving features, such as support for locating items, are prioritized over features that generate additional gains. Overall, shoppers are comfortable with hybrid digital-physical solutions, as 85.3% use their smartphone to keep a shopping list and 48% regularly use self-scanning services. This existing comfort with technology highlights a gradual and realistic innovation that can be added to the store environment to simplify the planning, navigation, and decision-making process early in the shopping journey.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As shopping practices evolve over time, understanding customer pain points should be treated as an ongoing process. Hence, from a managerial perspective, the study’s findings underscore the importance of viewing digital kiosks as tools for continuous experience development. Retailers that regularly reassess which pains and gains matter most are better positioned to adapt their value propositions accordingly.

The results suggest that digital kiosks can serve as a particularly useful managerial tool for addressing in-store frictions, such as navigation uncertainty and a lack of meal inspiration, without interfering with the functionally oriented fundamentals of grocery retail. Inspired by proven solutions in the fast-food and warehouse retail industries, kiosks can guide customers to specific products while simultaneously offering relevant inspiration. By reducing two of the most prominent pain points identified in the study, value is created for both customers and retailers. Customers benefit from a more efficient and inspirational shopping experience, while retailers may reduce staff dependency related to directional questions, thereby improving customer in-store flow.

Further, the kiosk provides managers with an interface for linking products, campaigns, and strategic priorities. When strategically placed at the store entrance, particularly in larger grocery stores (hypermarkets), the kiosk becomes integrated at the very beginning of the in-store customer journey, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and supporting commercial objectives. This approach reinforces the logic of pain-point-driven innovation, in which technology is first implemented to remove friction and only subsequently used to create additional value where it clearly supports the shopping task.

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## Reflections from the editors

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*Martin Moström, Lennart Wallander, Ulf Johansson, Carys Egan-Wyer*

Grocery shopping is overwhelmingly perceived as a mundane, routine chore, according to almost every chapter in this report, with studies consistently indicating that around 80% of customers describe the experience as uninspiring. Whilst customers regularly spend time and energy seeking meal inspiration from various sources outside the store, grocery shopping remains a task-driven activity in which proximity, price and assortment—rather than the shopping experience—dictate where and how people shop.

A common finding across the chapters of this report is that shoppers today rarely find inspiration inside the store. Instead, they rely on external sources such as social media, recipe platforms, and online channels. Ninety per cent of consumers surveyed by Bitter et al. obtain their meal inspiration from online rather than offline sources. Even established, habitual customer segments seldom derive inspiration from their in-store experiences. Closing this inspiration gap is, therefore, a central opportunity, and several cases in this report suggest that grocery stores are well positioned to reclaim this role—if they can become destinations for meal ideas rather than simply points of distribution for different parts of a meal.

The chapters in this report also reveal a tension between the utilitarian motivations that drive most grocery shopping trips—convenience, speed, task completion—and the hedonic motivations of inspiration, discovery and enjoyment that experiential retail seeks to activate. To bridge this potential gap, some authors have looked beyond grocery retail for inspiration, drawing on success stores in other industries, such as the fashion industry's pop-up formats, IKEA's lifestyle storytelling, fast-food self-service kiosks, food trucks, and gamified platforms, like Duolingo, Pokémon Go and Starbucks. This cross-industry inspiration is particularly valuable because it allows retailers to adopt formats that have been tested and refined elsewhere, reducing the risks of experimentation in a risk-averse indu-

stry. Some other industries have already solved the experience problem and are creating abundance of shopper experience. And grocery retail has much to learn from them.

A word of caution for grocery stores that want to be more experiential and inspirational: experience must never come at the cost of functionality. This constraint has important implications for how transformation should be implemented. The chapters present here converge on two recommendations. First, transformation should be gradual and non-disruptive: the chapters variously propose staged multi-year implementation plans, three-stage technological pathways and selective, small-footprint pilots, all grounded in the recognition that established shopping routines are fragile and that frequent or radical rearrangements risk diminishing customers' sense of autonomy and efficiency. Second, retailers should not shoulder experiential initiatives alone. The different chapters repeatedly highlight the need for strong brand partnerships, supplier co-creation, supplier cost-sharing models and the full outsourcing of operations to third parties, so that experiential initiatives do not burden store staff or compromise day-to-day operations in-store. The role of the supplier emerges particularly clearly here. Just as retailers cannot promote one category at the expense of the whole store assortment, suppliers cannot drive experiential transformation alone. However, collaboration can allow both parties to create excitement whilst preserving the broader functional logic of the store.

Together, the chapters in this report converge on an important insight: experiential transformation in grocery retail is not about replacing functionality but about layering experience on top of it. Whether the proposed change is a pop-up corner, a gamified app, a food truck, an automated kiosk, a chef battle, a farmers' market or a staged meal-destination strategy, every proposal should preserve the customer's ability to shop quickly and affordably whilst offering optional, non-disruptive moments

of inspiration, discovery and social connection. The common lesson is that experience must be subordinate to—and aligned with—the functional core of grocery retail, and that transformation is most likely to succeed when it is staged gradually, segmented carefully by customer type, and anchored in strong partnerships between retailers, suppliers, and brands.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR GROCERY RETAILERS

##### 1. Close the inspiration gap.

Shoppers overwhelmingly turn to social media, recipe platforms, and other online channels for meal inspiration, and only rarely find it inside the store itself. Yet the grocery store is arguably the most natural place to inspire meal choices, since it is where the ingredients already live. Retailers who can reclaim this role—whether through meal kits, life-situation shelves, recipe cards, themed booths, or cross-category bundles—stand to capture value that is currently being lost to external channels. The store should be where meal ideas begin, not where they end.

##### 2. Look outside grocery retail for inspiration but adapt carefully.

Other industries have already solved many of the experiential challenges that grocery retail is only now beginning to face. Fashion has perfected the pop-up, home décor has mastered lifestyle storytelling, food service has built the “grocerant” hybrid, gaming and education have refined gamification, and hospitality has long understood the value of human warmth and sensory engagement. The most promising innovations in grocery retail will not be invented from scratch but borrowed, translated, and scaled down to fit the functional realities of the supermarket floor.

##### 3. Protect the functional core—experience must be additive, never disruptive.

Grocery shopping is, and will remain, a task-driven activity in which price, proximity, speed, and assortment matter most. Experiential elements should therefore be designed as an optional layer that shoppers can engage with when they want to and ignore when they don’t. Pop-ups, gamified apps, food trucks, and open kitchens all work best when they preserve the shopper’s freedom to move quickly through a familiar store layout with clear pricing and unobstructed navigation.

##### 4. Transform gradually, and segment by customer type.

Habits and routines are powerful, and sudden change risks alienating precisely the loyal, high-frequency shoppers that retailers most depend on. Staged implementation plans—beginning with low-disruption formats and maturing into fully experiential concepts over several years—give both customers and organisations the time to adapt. At the same time, different segments value different things. Younger shoppers may embrace gamified apps and QR-based recipes, while older shoppers often prefer printed materials, layout familiarity, and knowledgeable staff. One-size-fits-all experiential design is likely to disappoint everyone.

##### 5. Don’t go at it alone—build experience through partnerships.

Experiential transformation is resource-intensive, and retailers cannot absorb the cost, staffing, and operational complexity on their own. Suppliers, brand partners, third-party operators, and even local producers all have something to gain from shared experiential initiatives, and are often willing to contribute event budgets, staffing, or logistical support in exchange for direct shopper engagement. “Hero” supplier cost-sharing, outsourced operations, and cross-category co-creation emerge as particularly viable models, allowing retailers to enrich the in-store experience without burdening store staff or compromising day-to-day operations.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR SUPPLIERS

While the chapters in this report were written primarily from a retailer perspective, almost every case points toward the same conclusion: experiential transformation cannot succeed without active supplier involvement. Suppliers are no longer simply providers of products to be shelved—they are increasingly partners in creating the shopper’s in-store experience. The following three takeaways translate the report’s findings into practical guidance for suppliers.

##### 1. Help retailers close the inspiration gap.

Suppliers must evolve from being product providers to becoming inspiration partners. It is no longer enough to deliver displays and promotional materials. Instead, suppliers should help retailers create meal solutions, life-situation merchandising, recipe-based displays, cross-category solutions, digital con-

tent connected to the in-store experience, and QR codes linking to recipes and social content directly at the shelf. Brands have a major opportunity here, because they often own both the content and the consumer and shopper insights needed to make these activations work. This requires reciprocity, however. Suppliers must select retailers who are genuinely open to closer cooperation. The goal is to make the brand part of the shopper's decision-making process — not just another SKU on the shopping list.

## **2. Build experiences that strengthen functionality—never disrupt it.**

The report is clear that grocery retail remains fundamentally functional. Price, speed, convenience, and simplicity almost always outweigh experience. This means suppliers must design activations that are optional, easy to understand, non-disruptive to shopper flow, and operationally simple for store staff. A common pitfall is to think in terms of events rather than shopping support. Experience should add inspiration without reducing efficiency, and the activations most likely to succeed are those that fit seamlessly into the shopper's existing routine.

## **3. Take a more active role as an innovation partner to retailers.**

One of the report's most important conclusions is that retailers cannot carry the cost of experiential transformation alone. This makes the supplier's role increasingly critical. Tomorrow's winning suppliers will not only deliver volume but will also contribute investment, data, shopper insights, content, technology, in-store staff training, and executional capabilities. This is about co-creation rather than traditional category management, and suppliers who embrace this expanded role will be in the strongest position to shape the next generation of the grocery shopping experience.

## **FINAL WORD**

Moving from selling products to selling meal solutions is not merely a tactical adjustment. It is a strategic shift. It requires retailers to move beyond a traditional product- and category-focused mindset and toward understanding and solving shoppers' everyday problems: What should we have for dinner tonight? How can I save time? How do I find inspiration within my budget?

This creates a clear capability challenge for large parts of the grocery retail industry. Historically, grocery retail organisations, processes, and KPIs have been built around operational efficiency, and far less around inspiration and innovation capabilities. Closing that gap will take time, and it will require not only new in-store concepts but also new ways of working, new metrics, and new partnerships.

The chapters in this report offer a glimpse of what that future might look like. Realising that future will depend, ultimately, on whether retailers and suppliers are willing to rebuild their capabilities together.

The following retail experts kindly shared advice and information with the authors of these chapters:

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