

Louvain School of Management

Impacts of Shoplifting Prevention Systems on Retail Employees in Belgium

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Academic year: 2023-2024
Dissertation for the master of Master [120] in Business Engineering
Master subject and focus Supply Chain
Daytime schedule

Declaration Regarding AI Tool Usage in Master's Thesis

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1. Writing corrector : ChatGpt was used to correct some phrasing in this work. It helped with the spelling and with grammatical errors

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By signing this declaration, we affirm that the content of this master's thesis reflects our original work, augmented by the responsible use of AI.

Lu et approuvé,

Le 4 août 2024 à Chaumont-Gistoux

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tegros', is written over the date and location text.

FOREWORD

As I conclude this work, some acknowledgements are in order. I would like to thank everybody who supported me throughout this final step of my academic journey.

Firstly, I am grateful to my master thesis supervisor, Nicolas Kervyn De Meerendré, for his guidance, feedback and recommendations.

I also want to thank my family and friends who have encouraged me and gave me precious advices.

Lastly, I want to thank every retail worker that dedicated me time and generously shared their experiences and insights making this work possible.

ABSTRACT:

Shoplifting is a global problem, it impacts many people around the world and in Belgium. In this master thesis, we examine the under-explored subject of shoplifting prevention systems and their impacts on Belgian retail employees. It will rely on theoretical foundations as well as practical analysis with twelve interviews of Belgian retail employees who gave their personal experiences and insights.

Effects of various loss prevention systems will be looked into, human surveillance, CCTV cameras, Electronical Article Surveillance, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design and security guards. Findings highlights a complex balance retailers need to find between the need for secure their goods and the consequences created on employees' well-being. Security systems mainly have a reassuring role but they can also create additional costs, waste of time and employee discomfort.

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Introduction

Shoplifting is a global problem. Worldwide, the impacts on the shop owners can be devastating. It affects a huge number of people in the world and Belgium is no exception. In 2021, the retail sector employed 22% of the Belgian workers (Statbel, 2023). Shoplifting is a concern for nearly every retailer, with estimates showing that nine out of ten shops in Belgium experience theft at least once a week (Crête, J. & Kiritsis, A., 2024). This crime wave has been growing. Shoplifting is one of the most common crimes, but it is among the least likely to be detected or reported (Clarke, 2002).

To delve into the complex issue of shoplifting, the first step was to define a clear research question. The consequences of shoplifting for employees remain an underexplored subject and there is even less work on the consequences of shoplifting prevention measures. The goal of this work is to understand this problem and try to identify the different impacts on employees that have to deal with recurrent shoplifting and if security measures always bring positive outcomes for them. The impact on their morale, job satisfaction, and the overall store operations will be looked into. The research question is therefore: *what are the consequences of shoplifting prevention measures, how do they influence Belgian retail workers?*

Retail workers are here considered to be “a person who works in a store selling goods to the public” (Cambridge Dictionary, n. d.).

To arrive at some answers for the research question and understand the consequences, we need to understand the shoplifting problem in its entirety. After this introduction, the rest of this work is divided into three main parts: the literature review, a qualitative analysis and the conclusion.

The literature review focuses on examining the existing research on shoplifting. To separate this broad subject into more manageable parts, four chapters have been created in the forms of questions.

Chapter one: *What is shoplifting?* It provides a definition and scope for this problem. Chapter two (*How common is shoplifting?*) brings the commonness of shoplifting to light and focuses on the types of people that commit this crime. Chapter three asks the question, *how can we fight shoplifting?* It'll look into the loss prevention process with existing security systems and the legal framework in Belgium. Chapter four, *what are the consequences of shoplifting*, is the last and biggest chapter from the literature review. This answers almost directly to the

research question. Psychological and financial consequences on customers and employees will be explained. Consequences of the security systems will also be highlighted.

The second major part of this work is an analysis of a qualitative study. Twelve interviews with employees from the retail sector in Belgium were conducted. The goal there was to understand their perception of the security at work and how shoplifting and loss prevention systems impact them personally. This second part is divided into four main chapters. First is the methodology, with explanations on the sampling method, participant profiles and the analysis. The second chapter addresses the results, which are collected and divided by themes into five categories: the general theme of security, the general problematic of theft, some personal experiences, the security systems and their reactions/emotions. The third chapter is a discussion summarizing all essential points and comparing them to the previously seen theory. The last chapter gives some managerial recommendations for the different stakeholders in their fight against shoplifting.

The third and last part of this work is the conclusion. It contains the limitations of this master thesis, recommendations for future work and a final conclusive note.

PART I Literature Review

1. What is shoplifting?

1.1. Types of theft and Shoplifting description

According to the Belgian law: “anyone who has fraudulently taken something that does not belong to him is guilty of theft” (Code Pénal Belge, 1867, art.461). There exist a lot of different types of thefts from robbery to burglary, aggravated theft, pickpocketing and so many others. Shoplifting is one kind of theft.

Shoplifting is a form of consumer misbehavior. Dysfunctional consumer behavior is a term used in marketing and management studies. It consists in acts, committed by customers that result in harm to the organization, to employees, to other customers or to the physical environment. It includes aggression verbal and phisic, theft, vandalism, etc. (Fisk et al., 2010). Shoplifting is defined as “the act of stealing merchandise offered for sale in a retail store”(Perlman & Ozinci, 2014).

Shoplifting numbers are often calculated as a part of the larger measurement of retail losses called inventory shrinkage. Retailers calculate their shrink rate by regrouping multiple types of losses over a fixed period. It includes both internal and external theft, operational or process mistakes, systemic errors and vendor fraud. In average, shoplifting (internal and external theft) represent about two thirds of this shrink rate (National Retail Federation, 2023, p.1). In this work, the focus is exclusively on shoplifting.

Shops that have the most attractive merchandise for thieves are the ones with CRAVED items. This acronym stands for items that are Concealable, Removable, Available, Valuable, Enjoyable and finally Disposable. Concealable is about the possibility to hide the product to exit the shop discreetly and removable refers to how easy they are to move and take from the shop. Available means the product is easily obtainable while valuable is the preciousness of the goods. The item is enjoyable if it gives thieves pleasure to have and it is desirable to them. Lastly, disposable refers to how easy it'll be to get rid of/sell the stolen items (Clarke, 1999, pp. 23-26).

According to the Global Retail Theft Barometer, shoplifters mainly concentrate on small, expensive and easily resaleable goods, particularly small electrical goods and accessories, cosmetics, batteries, clothing accessories, etc. (cited in Özaşçılar & Ozturk, 2023, p.70).

In Belgium, approximately 24.000 shoplifting incidents have been recorded by the police in 2023. The tendency worldwide is an increase of the number of thefts, Belgium is not an exception with the highest number recorded in 2023 for the last ten years (Police Fédérale [Belgique], 2024).

Table 1 Numbers of Shoplifting Incidents Reported in Belgium per Region

Region	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Région: Région flamande	13507	13842	11213	12248	15199	16185
Région: Région de Bruxelles-Capitale	2527	2414	2090	2144	2455	2282
Région: Région wallonne	6525	6215	4588	5019	5613	5554
Région: Inconnu	0	0	0	0	0	0

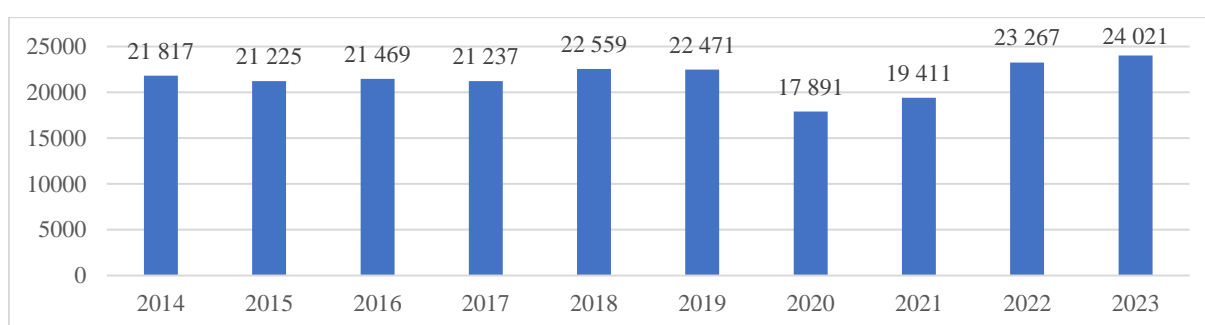


Figure 1 Number of Shoplifting incidents in Belgium

1.2. Example of techniques

Shoplifting is not limited to people grabbing and stealing merchandise in a store, Caime and Ghone (1996) provides examples of shoplifting technics. Here are some of them (cited in Hayes & Tallman, 2013, pp.4-5):

Using an accomplice as a decoy to distract security, Going with a large group of thieves to overwhelm security, Reusing a receipt to steal the same item, Buying a cheaper product to turn attention away from the more expensive one hidden, Trying to get a refund on an unpaid article and if the vendor refuses, leaving with said article, Grabbing a product and exiting the shop running, Faking an injury or illness so the employees are more likely to be concerned about the shoplifter than suspicious, Stealing a very large amount of products while faking to be totally at ease, Using the emergency exit, Concealing items hidden on the body, or for instance wearing the stolen clothes when exiting the shop, Setting the fire alarm, Grazing (it means consuming goods inside the shop then not paying for it when exiting), Hiding items in a packaging from a cheaper product, Swapping price tag to get an article cheaper, etc.

1.3. External vs Internal Shoplifting

Two main distinctions can be highlighted when looking at shoplifting. There are external shoplifting and internal shoplifting. In other words, it can be committed by strangers not linked with the shop or by insiders of the shop.

External theft describes shoplifting done by outsider people. It is generally done by clients, strangers passing by, organized criminal groups, etc. (Bonnet, 2008).

Internal shoplifting is the one committed by workers of the retail place. Employee theft is a significant problem for all retailers. Many studies show that between 40 and 50% of retail losses are linked with employees theft (Scicchitano et al., 2004, p.7), inducing costs of billions of dollars to retailers around the world. It is easier for employees to steal. They have more opportunities to do it with their open access to products in the shop, access to the reserve and to the money in the cash register. They can also control the security systems (National Retail Federation, 2023, p.15) which can incur many undetected thefts (P. Korgaonkar et al., 2021, pp.721-730). Employees theft damage the shop in a very harmful way (Kennedy, 2017). It impacts other employees, owners, managers and all other stakeholders.

The most frequently mentioned tactics of internal theft are: merchandise theft, refund fraud, cash/deposit theft and passing off merchandise to friends (National Retail Federation, 2023, p.15). Two main ways to fight this internal theft tendency have been found, you can apply an internal control system or/and conduct random inspections (Yaniv, 2009). Educative prevention has also been proven to be effective (National Retail Federation, 2023, p.15).

2. How common is shoplifting?

Shoplifting has become an ordinary crime, many people steal at some point in their lives (Glasscock et al., 1988, pp.272-278). It was found that, in the United States, one in 11 shoppers (8.5%) commits some acts of shoplifting (Dabney et al., 2004, pp.694-728) and more recently, academics estimate that 30% of shoppers commit shoplifting (cited in Bai et al., 2019, p.2). An older statistic found by the author Ray J., shows that up to 60% of consumers have committed some sort of theft (cited in Krasnovsky & Lane, 1998, p.219). Shoplifters profiles are very diverse, they can come from all ages, ethnic backgrounds, genders and economic statuses (Krasnovsky & Lane, 1998, pp.225-228). Therefore, to

understand these surprising statistics, this work will focus on the extensive research that tried to identify the characteristics of the individual's motivations for engaging in these acts.

The biggest triggers for shoplifting intentions were found to be consumer alienation, sensation seeking, and materialism (Bai et al., 2019, p.4-5; Shi et al., 2022, p. 295). Three main conditions push a person to commit shoplifting. Firstly, thieves must feel motivated by a need or a reason to take the items. Secondly, thieves must have a relatively easy access to the desired product. And lastly, they must believe that the probability of being caught and punished is relatively low (Hayes, 1993).

Different classifications of shoplifters can be analyzed. The author Cameron did a first analysis in 1964. She identified that there are 2 main types divided by their motivations. The first type consists of the professionals, the ones that steal to sell. The other type, the pilferers, accounts for approximately 90% of the thieves, they are ordinary citizens with no contact with criminal organizations (cited in Krasnovsky & Lane, 1998, pp. 219-225).

Extending on Cameron's primary research, Moore used five classification criteria to differentiate patterns of shoplifters: 1) frequency, 2) primary precipitating factors, 3) attitude toward shoplifting, 4) use of stolen goods and 5) reaction to detection. After an extensive research, Moore ended up with five different types of thieves (Moore, 1984, cited in Krasnovsky & Lane, 1998, pp. 219-225).

The first type is the "impulse shoplifters", 15.4% of shoplifters. They are the people that steal the most rarely and usually take inexpensive items. They just succumb to the temptation of an opportunity in a very unplanned way and they do not repeat often. These people feel shame and guilt when they get caught and are most unlikely to do it again.

The second type is the occasional shoplifters, 15% of shoplifters. They steal around 5-10 items a year and minimize the seriousness of their acts. Their motivations are mostly the peer pressure and for the challenge, economic reasons are secondary. When getting caught, they will most likely confess and be a little embarrassed.

The third type is the "episodic shoplifters", only 1.7% of shoplifters. Some people have mental problems and feel a need for self-punishment. They steal specific goods as a part of their personal rituals and the act of theft has most likely been induced by important psychosocial stressors. They are aware of their wrong doing.

The fourth and biggest type is the amateur thieves, 56.4% of shoplifters. They shoplift on a regular basis and are aware of the possible consequences. They take small and concealable items with predefined techniques. This category follows the balance of costs and benefits when they take the decision to steal. If they are caught, they minimize their acts and try to manipulate people to get away with it.

The final category includes all “semi-professional shoplifters”, 11.7% of shoplifters. Shoplifting is a chronic behavior and a part of their lifestyle. They commit theft on a weekly basis even though they are fully aware of its illegality. The desire to have luxurious things and the willingness to save money drive them to steal. They use skilled techniques and might resell the stolen goods. Some of them feel unfairly treated by society. They use shoplifting as a compensation to get what they think they deserve, they don't think it is wrong. When apprehended, they will try to deny it and they will not feel a strong sense of guilt.

3. How can we prevent shoplifting?

If an opportunity to steal presents itself, most people will take advantage of it. The presence of theft is almost unavoidable. The goal is therefore to amplify the risks for thieves, reduce the losses as much as possible and make occasions to steal rarer (Beck, 2016b). This is why a lot of different systems to secure your goods have been developed.

3.1. Difficulty to choose

There is a subtle balance between the need for retailers to put their products in the higher visibility for potential clients, and the need to protect the products and deter potential shoplifters. A balance between ‘user-friendly’ and ‘abuser-unfriendly’ (Ekblom, 1997, p.250). It can be hard for retailers to choose what cost-effective solution with an interesting return on investment is the best for their stores (Ekblom, 1986, p.2). The milieu of retail is evolving quickly with the arrival of new technologies and so are the tactics of thieves. The challenge to prevent these crimes therefore requires constant, ongoing effort (Beck & Hopkins, 2017). Sometimes, a “quick fix”, such as switching places for some items, will decrease the number of thefts for these specific articles but it will not reduce the loss problem in the long run (Beck et al., 2002). Retailers need to understand their loss profile by analyzing its root deeply.

3.2. Preventive Process

Ekblom defined the theory of preventive process in four steps. First, define the problem. Find the patterns, the trouble spots, that might be the sign of a vulnerability in your shop. Then,

decide what to do, elaborate strategies. Thirdly, put them into practice. Monitor the evolution of the plan and the fourth step is to evaluate the impacts of the implemented strategies and repeat (Ekblom, 1986, pp.2-3).

Repeating this analysis in the last step is crucial, as time passes, the effectiveness of security measures becomes obsolete. Thieves adjust their techniques in response to the installation of new systems, this is called the concept of displacement. When blocked in their first choice of action, thieves adapt and seek new strategies. They might go to new places with different levels of security to steal the initial or a similar item. They can change the timing of their actions, for instance, take advantage of the rush hours (Ekblom, 1997). Thieves can also get interested in other targets, with no electronic tag, for example, or no special packaging (Lasky et al., 2017, p.13).

3.3. Loss Prevention Strategies

There exist four main approaches to loss prevention strategies all aiming to reduce inventory shrinkage: pre-employment integrity screening measures, employee awareness programs, asset control policies (e.g. refund controls, trash removal controls, ...) and loss prevention systems (Hollinger & Davis, 2003).

Prevention strategies against theft can be educational such as for instance, a campaign to tarnish the image of shoplifters, or a campaign to remind everyone of the bad consequences of theft for the retailers (R. A. Fullerton & Punj, 1997). The objective here is to reduce the number of thefts.

These strategies can also take a dissuasive approach using concrete loss prevention systems. Some of these operational solutions are the training of employees and customer service, hiring some security personnel, formal and informal surveillance, etc. The goal there is to amplify the risks for potential thieves. Amplifying the risks of being caught improves the sense of security for customers with formal and informal surveillance, it reduces both the number of crimes and the fear of crime (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010, pp.300–305).

3.4. Loss prevention systems

There are multiple approaches to classifying loss prevention systems. As discussed above, shoplifting prevention systems, including both formal and informal surveillance, play a crucial role in enhancing security. But what exactly are they?

3.4.a. Informal Surveillance:

Informal surveillance consists of increasing the perception that thieves can be seen (Beck, 2016a). This type of surveillance can be achieved mainly by using the theory of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. It is used around the world to tackle crime and increase the feeling of safety (Cozens et al., 2005). Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is defined by Crowe, T. as “the proper design and effective use of the built environment which can lead to a reduction in the fear of crime and the incidence of crime, and to an improvement in the quality of life” (Crowe, 2000, p.46).

Shoplifters consider the design of the shop as a factor in their decision to steal (Cardone & Hayes, 2012, p.37). “If offenders perceive that they can be observed (even if they are not), they may be less likely to offend, given the increased potential for intervention, apprehension and prosecution” (Cozens et al., 2005). In a retail store it may be implemented by, for instance restroom doors visible from main pedestrian areas and away from outside exits, well-lit parking areas, ensuring loading areas do not create dead-end alleys or blind spots, high intensity lighting to minimize hiding places, etc. Using wider aisles and lower shelves can also be a “natural” deterrent for thieves. Placing the most valuable products in a high visibility area is another effective way to reduce theft risk. Employees can keep an eye on the precious merchandise while managing their other tasks.

3.4.b. Formal Surveillance:

Formal surveillance consists of systematic and organized security systems, a lot of different options exist (Beck, 2016a; Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010b, p.302).

1) Human attention from employees and/or security agents:

The police can be dispatched to the location when called for a crime, but the preventive role must be held by the company as it is on their private property. Specialized people hired to ensure security in the workplace are an effective way to fight shoplifting. It is a deterrent for both internal and external theft. Some claimed that managers perceive uniformed guards as a very effective deterrent to casual thieves (Pretious et al., 1995, pp. 28-35). Guard-protected stores deter potential thieves more than other stores (Gill, 2007). Thieves find it harder to bypass human surveillance compared to technological methods (Tonglet, 2000).

Employee incompetence was found to be a trigger for shoplifting decisions of customers (Shi et al., 2022) Employees are thus considered a security system in itself. They have the role of

guardian to the goods the store is selling. Felson and Boba define guardianship as ‘someone whose mere presence serves as a gentle reminder that someone is looking’ (cited in Potdar, Guthrie, Gnoth, et al., 2018). Employees may be trained to react appropriately when facing shoplifting.

2) Special packaging:

With designed packaging, items can be placed in specialized security packaging (e.g. keeper boxes, spider wrapping, etc.) that can only be removed with specific tools. For instance, razor blades are often secured in such packaging. Another strategy involves using larger-than-necessary packaging to reduce the removability of CRAVED items (see section 1.1). It can also be limited by a protective display fixture. Objects are attached to a cable that if pulled, display a loud sound, for instance in technological devices stores (Lasky et al., 2017, p.6).

3) Cameras:

Cameras are a widely used technology for ensuring security. It is installed in shops but also to monitor streets, personal properties, etc. Their presence was proven to be effective as a deterrent to potential thieves, especially for impulse and occasional shoplifter (see Section 2 “why is shoplifting so common”) (Beck & Willis, 1999).

Cameras can be used as a public viewing monitor. When you see yourself on a screen when entering a shop, it consists as a live feed of the activities in the shop floor (Lasky et al., 2017, pp.5-6).

Another type of video surveillance is CCTV cameras. Closed-circuit television systems are a form of surveillance consisting of cameras recording the activity on the shop floor. It is supposedly equivalent to a security guard being replaced by an omnipresent, near-infallible robot eye in the sky on duty 24 hours a day (Harris et al., 1998). Multiple studies tried to measure its concrete impacts on the losses but the outcomes vary greatly. There is sometimes an improvement in stock loss reduction of up to 20%, but the effectiveness of CCTV cameras is shown to decrease over time (Beck, 2016a, pp.23-26).

Some new technologies in cameras are using artificial intelligence algorithms. They scan the body of customers and if they do something suspicious, for instance put an item in a stroller, an alert with the video is sent to the supervisor, who can then judge the level of action necessary (Hogan et al., 2023).

4) Electronic Article Surveillance (EAS):

EAS is one of the most widespread security systems in the world, and thus one of the most studied. It consists of electronic tags or stickers attached to the articles that will trigger an alarm if the product is taken through the exit without payment. Bob DiLonardo, a veteran of the security industry, described it as an effective way to increase the openness of the product's display while still reducing the possibility of theft. This helps achieve the balance described before. A study conducted by Buckle et al. in 1992 found that the EAS systems bring a shrinkage of about 76 to 93%. They found it to be more effective than CPTED or security guards. Another study announced more nuanced results: a reduction between 35% and 75% (DiLonardo, 1996). Although the reduction is generally noted, its magnitude is debatable.

With the new technologies, new kinds of tagging systems are appearing. For instance, RFID (Radio-Frequency Identification) tags are more discreet and efficient systems. It has been proven effective to reduce losses in stores with self-scan cash registers where there is between 30 and 147% more theft (Dickinson, 2018).

5) Other

Crime Prevention through Environmental design can also be used to facilitate the use of formal surveillance. Implementing systematic and organized elements of security in the design of the store can reduce shoplifting incidents (Beck, 2016a, pp.30-34,46).

Mirrors are mentioned in the literature. They can be used as a help to human surveillance by increasing the visibility in the shop. Their presence has been researched by academics in a minor way and it wasn't proved to be an effective deterrent for thieves. It was even found that thieves might sometimes use these mirrors to monitor staff themselves while they steal (Lasky et al., 2017, p.4,16).

3.4.c. Organizational Commitment:

Organizational attachment is defined as “an individual's psychological and behavioral involvement in a social group or unit of which he or she is a member” (Tsui et al., 1992, p.554). It was proven that employee organizational attachment is a positive influence on the reduction of external and of internal theft rates (Potdar, Guthrie, Gnoth, et al., 2018). It can therefore be considered as a loss prevention system in itself.

There is an impact of the employer-employee closeness and the psychological attachment on the shoplifting prevention system human surveillance. Van Dick et al. (2008) describe job

satisfaction as an important part of employees' feelings, along with organizational trust and commitment. They understand how the reactions of employees when facing shoplifting are linked with these three pillars (cited in Potdar, Guthrie, Gnoth, et al., 2018).

On the other hand, it was proven that internal shoplifting in family-style firms is as present, or maybe even more present than in regular shops. Having a clear picture of this tendency is hard because theft within a family is far less often reported but was studied that participants' genetic link with retailers increase theft intentions (O'Brien et al., 2018, pp. 421-430).

3.5. Legal Framework

Apart from the loss prevention systems seen above, the law is also a way to prevent shoplifting. What is the legal framework in Belgium regarding shoplifting events?

For a thief to be legally accountable, they must be caught after committing the act of stealing, such as at the exit of the shop. When the shoplifter is caught red-handed, there are multiple ways it can unfold. The first one is that they can find an agreement with the vendor to give back or pay for the product, and reimburse eventual damages. If the thief doesn't want to cooperate, the worker is legally allowed to detain them while waiting for the police, but workers are not allowed to use force or violence to keep them on site (Bottamedi, C., 2023; Securitas, 2018).

When the police arrives on the scene, the retailer can press charges. The police officer can then impose a fine (called immediate transaction) of up to 350 euros, in addition to repaying possible damages. But this transaction has some conditions. Firstly, the thief must be caught red-handed, they must acknowledge the fault and agree to pay. If they don't complete the payment in 2 weeks, they will face a judge and risk a heavier sentence (Service public fédéral Justice, 2023). In Brussels, this immediate transaction is not applicable anymore. Authorities had no funds to allocate police officers for the follow-up of this measure (Durant, J., 2023).

The use of cameras is strictly controlled in Belgium, a new restrictive law: "Loi camera" was passed in 2018 (Police Locale Haute Senne, 2018). For those present in a workplace, it must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation. It is a European regulation regarding the data privacy. The camera must be installed to fulfill specific goals: 1) For the security or health, 2) Protection of company properties, 3) Control of the production process, to monitor the machines or the workers, 4) To control employees' performances, but the employer cannot

base their evaluation of the worker solely on the results of the camera's surveillance (Autorité de protection des données, 2024).

For the first two points, and for the control of the machines, the cameras can be active continuously. Otherwise, they must be temporarily. The workers must be informed of their installation before they become active. They must be aware of their purpose, if the images will be kept and how long. They have to know how many cameras will be installed and when they will be turned on. The employer must maintain a log to keep track of the activity of the cameras and provide access to the workers to the footage. They can keep the footage for a maximum of one month, or longer if it serves as evidence of an infraction. The customers must also be made aware of the existence of the cameras. Stores can also install fake cameras, they are then not subject to the law (Service Public Fédéral Belge, n. d.).

The owner of the footage can only share it with the police. The publication on social media or the printing of pictures to show them in the shop is forbidden. The thief filmed and shared on social networks is entitled to file a complaint for damage to their image and abusive use, leading to emotional distress (Securitas, 2018).

4. What are the consequences of shoplifting?

Shoplifting is a global issue that significantly affects the daily lives of many individuals and leads to various consequences. To address the research question, global consequences of shoplifting were identified. This section focuses on examining the diverse impacts of shoplifting on both customers and retailers. First, we will explore people's reactions to shoplifting. How do witnesses react to shoplifting? Next, we will examine the psychological impacts it may have on them. The third section will analyze shoplifting concrete financial implications and finally the last and biggest section will look into the different consequences of loss prevention systems, on customers, on employees and their general efficiency.

4.1. Reactions

A study found that most of the time, people are not even aware of the shoplifting happening in their presence, and if they do notice it, only a few number of people report it to the shop's staff. Reactions to shoplifting can be very diverse (Lortie-Lussier et al., 1984, pp.181-189).

The act of shoplifting is not always strictly condemned by witnesses. Four kinds of reactions when looking at other people's deviant behavior, such as theft, were identified. The first

reaction is being lenient, witnesses are more tolerant and do not strictly condemn the culprit. The second type of people feel like it depends of the situation, sometimes a crime can be acceptable, their perception on the acceptability of the crime can be ambivalent. The third are the conformists, they follow social norms and do not accept out-of-bound behaviors. This reaction is the most often expressed and these people do not have as much ambivalent acceptance. Either it is acceptable or not. The last ones are the puritans, they are the ones with the strictest standards of behavior. They will not accept anyone who does not respect the laws of conduct (S. Fullerton et al., 1996, pp.805-812).

In the same vein, reactions can also be described as “rigorist, comprehensive or permissive”. Rigorists have a zero tolerance policy. Any deviant behavior is unacceptable, whatever the reason, they can understand but not accept it. Comprehensive people don’t automatically condemn deviant behaviors. It depends on the context and motivations of the fault, some may be excused. Permissive ones do not condemn people, they understand some deviant behaviors if they don’t create victims (Perron & Djelassi, 2015, pp.55-68).

Sometimes people might find themselves even relating to the thieves. They try to find explanations to justify the actions. This is called neutralization/rationalization of the deviant behaviors. There are five major types of justifications. First, the denial of responsibility. They say it’s an accident, the deviant is not accountable, they are outside forces beyond their control. The denial of injury is when the act is illegal but not considered immoral. When no one is harmed or the impacted people can afford it. The denial of victim is when the offender says the victim deserved it, it is a rightful form of punishment. The fourth type is when it involves a condemnation of the condemner. For instance, when they say that the people blaming them, are hypocrites or the police is corrupt. The last one is the appeal to higher loyalty. The societal demands are being ignored to fulfill the demand of a smaller social group (example gang, friend group, etc.)(Perron & Djelassi, 2015; Sykes & Matza, 1957).

The good supermarket-customer relationship in shoplifting prevention is believed to have a positive impact on inventory losses. It was found that customers’ trust, satisfaction, and commitment to supermarkets will likely reduce shoplifting incidents (Potdar, Guthrie, & Gnoth, 2018). Yet this belief was nuanced, this close relationship might be taken advantage of, by misbehaving opportunistic customers (Shi et al., 2022, p. 296).

4.2. Psychological Consequences

Shoplifting evokes a wide range of emotions in customers and employees who witness it, with negative emotions being the most prevalent (Fisk et al., 2010).

When a shop is a repeated target of shoplifting, other customers, with ethical behavior, may feel unsafe and avoid the place, reduce their shopping activity, make shorter shopping visits at daytime hours and finally switch to competitors because of their fear of crime (Warr, 2000).

Employees might feel a fear of taking action against shoplifting, as studies showed that the receipt of social control also tends to provoke some degree of angry emotion (Nugier et al., 2007). In other words, when an offender is reprimanded, they might get angry and take it out on the worker. A study conducted in 2023 in the United States, revealed that 88% of American retailers believe shoplifters are more aggressive compared to 2022. This belief is confirmed by the number of shoplifting acts with violence that rose by 35% on average (National Retail Federation, 2023, p.1). Violence in retail can cause injury, trauma and even death to employees. Another study showed that American employees are more likely to get injured in a shop (in the study: grocery, liquor shops) than customers (Peek-Asa et al., 2006, p.1867).

When reacting to the deviant behavior of clients, employees must act cautiously, as it can become bad publicity for the brand if it goes sour (Reniou et al., 2018). But it was studied that the politeness of the employee during the “interaction” has no impact on the offender (Nugier et al., 2007). Furthermore, dealing regularly with this type of behavior can lead to irritability for employees. Deviant behavior of consumers can leave emotional damage to witnesses (employees or clients) (Reniou et al., 2018).

The news website, RTL info, found that retailers are angry and frustrated because of shoplifting. They feel like the justice system is not efficient. According to the CEO of Buurtsuper.be Luc Ardies, in Belgium, only 11% of retailers report incidents of shoplifting to the police. They feel alone when addressing this problem, as police officers are unable to respond directly to every individual theft incident (Crête, J. & Kiritsis, A., 2024).

Paradoxically, some researchers believe that witnessing shoplifting might evoke positive feelings in some individuals. People who act ethically may feel an enhanced sense of well-being when they compare their behavior to the one of a dishonest customer (Fisk et al., 2010).

4.3. Financial Consequences

Financial impacts of shoplifting on retailers are more present and have been more studied. In the United States, this issue is widespread and highly significant, multiple research over the years tried to grasp its magnitude. The approximate loss in sales is 6.6% in the United States. Typically, each incident of shoplifting represents a minuscule financial loss compared to the overall turnover of the retail business, but the whole volume of shoplifting for a full year presents a major financial loss to retailers (Hartmann et al., 1972). The American industry giant Target recorded losses of over 500 million in inventory shrinkage in 2023. Target has thus been closing stores in high-risk of crime areas to try to manage this problem (Editorial Board, 2023). This shrinkage number includes products lost to shoplifters, dishonest employees, vendor fraud, and administrative error (Luther, 2022).

In Belgium, 24 021 cases of shoplifting were reported in 2023 (Police fédérale Belge, 2024). Luc Ardies, CEO of UNIZO, stated that shoplifting became the fourth most important cost for retailers, after salaries, rent and energy costs (cited in Service public fédéral Justice, 2023). Belgian retailers lose about 1.9% of their turnover due to shoplifting each year. The CEO of Comeos, the “fédération of commerce”, stated that three million euros are stolen every day in Belgium. This represents about 900 million € lost to theft for Belgian retailers. Belgium ranks second among the European countries most affected by shoplifting (Bosteels, K., 2019).

Retailers face direct costs, loss of inventory and profit, but also all indirect costs such as the capital invested in purchasing, processing, marketing, and displaying that item - as well as the opportunity cost of capital (Hayes & Tallman, 2013, p.2). Furthermore, shops can experience a loss of sales. If thieves take all quantities of a popular product or if the store has a bad reputation, clients will go to the competition and spend their money there (Warr, 2000). In extreme cases, chronic levels of crime can force shops to close thereby limiting employment opportunities and the availability of goods and services (Hopkins & Gill, 2017).

Another source of costs to consider is the legal implications. When retailers choose to prosecute thieves, it incurs additional monetary expenses and can be time-consuming (Hayes & Tallman, 2013, p.2; Shearing, 1982, p274).

A financial repercussion can finally also be passed on to clients. Firstly, it might negatively affect the shopper by increasing the probability of products being out of stock (Beck & Palmer, 2010). Secondly, items prices might be higher because of the “crime tax”. In other words, retailers may have to raise their prices to cover their expenses (P. K. Korgaonkar et al.,

2020, pp.721-730). According to a Checkpoint Systems survey in 2014-2015, the crime in retail and the investment in theft prevention measures cost a Belgian family 266€ per year . This number is not only linked with the retail crime shoplifting, it includes employees and suppliers fraud that represent the biggest part of this cost (cited in Boyle, 2015).

4.4. Consequences of Prevention Systems

Supermarket chains annually invest millions of dollars in staff and surveillance equipment that detect, deter, and prevent shoplifting (Babin & Babin, 1996). All types of retailers have these costs. Belgian retailers are no exception to this trend and spent approximately 400 million in the fight against shoplifting (Bosteels K., 2019). This financial consequence of shoplifting is huge and has consequences on its own.

“Formal and informal surveillance have a positive impact on consumers and employees’ security feelings and on the competitiveness of shops” (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010, pp.300-305). Even though the ability of informal surveillance to deter crime is unclear, no investment in security creates risks (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010, pp.300-305). It means a lack of cameras, inducing blind spots in the store, the absence of capable guardians, and the non-attendance of floor employees, all of which can lead to shoplifting decisions (P. K. Korgaonkar et al., 2020, pp.721-730). Which can then lead to the consequences of shoplifting seen above (see sections 4.1., 4.2. and 4.3.).

4.4.a. On Clients

Providing a place where people can feel safe is a major concern in the conquest of competitiveness. If customers don’t feel safe and comfortable, they won’t spend as much of their time and money in the shop. Consequently, crime prevention measures generally foster a sense of security among clients (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010a, pp.1-7).

However, sometimes, loss-prevention measures can negatively affect shopping experience. Overly intrusive surveillance can have an inverse effect, pushing shoppers to question their safety. They may wonder why such extensive measures are necessary, thereby becoming more aware of potential dangers. A study conducted in Finland supports this notion, revealing that the presence of formal surveillance, such as cameras and security guards in a shop, negatively impacts their customers. Instead of enhancing their sense of safety, it serves as a constant reminder of potential risks (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010, pp.300-305).

Furthermore, when they feel too observed, clients become uncomfortable and feel less in control of their privacy. They might then leave the store (Esmark et al., 2017). There is also the risk for innocent customers to be wrongfully accused. Numbers are hard to document but there are evidence in the news media that it is a significant issue (P. K. Korgaonkar et al., 2020, pp.721-730).

Some security systems specially designed to protect employees can also negatively affect clients. For instance, protective barriers that isolate employees will protect them in case of a violent incident, but leave customers in a vulnerable position (Peek-Asa et al., 2006, p.1871).

On the other hand, the presence of all the security measures are now part of the retail landscape and there seems to be a passive acceptance of cameras filming the daily life (Harris et al., 1998). People are getting used to seeing them so they don't even notice them anymore. A study showed that only 1 person in 5 notices cameras (Beck, 2016a, p.25). Furthermore, informal, more subtle, surveillance tends to instill a sense of security among clients (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010, pp.300–305).

In a financial perspective, clients might benefit from the security systems as it also aims to reduce the “crime tax” (see section 5.3.). As cited in the article, “Amplifying risk in retail stores”, “the consumer benefits [from loss prevention systems] because retailers end up losing less and can therefore pass on this saving through lower prices” (Beck, 2016a, p.17).

4.4.b. On Retailers

Overall, little research has been led to understand the effects of other forms of formal and informal surveillance on employees. The study in Finland also found that formal surveillance affects employees in a negative way, but it was not statistically significant (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010, pp.300–305). Shop employees are the main victims of this crime. Preventing it as best as possible is important for employees' well-being. The consequences of the investment in prevention on employees are scarcely researched.

“Shop-floor employees consistently working in the presence of customers may be utilized as human surveillance.” (Potdar, Guthrie, Gnoth, et al., 2018). Theft makes employees' jobs more difficult. They have to spend time doing security such as checking bags and camera footage. Their efficiency at work is thus not optimal (Hocquelet, 2013, p.147).

Other studies found security presence to be reassuring for employees. For instance, with the cameras, “Staff did feel more confident to approach customers acting suspiciously, mainly

because they felt evidence was available to support them if anything should go wrong.” (Beck, 2016a, p.25).

4.4.c. Effectiveness of the Systems

Concrete impacts of loss prevention systems on shoplifting have been more frequently researched. While the installation of any system consistently reduces shoplifting rates, the degree of reduction varies significantly among different systems (Beck, 2016a; Cozens et al., 2005). The effectiveness of human surveillance can be linked with the previous section about the effects on retailers and the consequences of shoplifting.

1) Cameras:

Thanks to cameras, improvements in stock loss reduction were recorded, but their effectiveness decreases over time. It was theorized that thieves were at first concerned about cameras but, after some time (26 weeks in some studies), their effects wore off as they become more familiar with their presence (Beck, 2016a, p.25). Ironically, the presence of cameras on the shop floor can also create an "exaggerated sense of security". The staff, counting on the dissuasive effectiveness of the cameras, might not use the cameras efficiently. If the footage is not checked with enough attention, the effect on shoplifting can be limited (Beck & Willis, 1999). “CCTV may cause feelings of security to go up but in the process cause staff feelings of responsibility for crime prevention to go down” (Beck & Willis, 1999, p.265). Another negative side is poor positioning of cameras. It can create blind spots which might then be used by thieves to guide themselves in the stores, to poorly secured areas (Lasky et al., 2017, p.12,17). Privacy concerns can also be a prevalent issue raised against the installation of cameras (Harris et al., 1998, p.5).

2) Electronic Article Surveillance:

Even though academics found that the EAS system brings about a shrinkage between 35% and 75%, its perceived effectiveness is debatable. Various studies found low levels of confidence in the dissuasive impacts of Electronic Article Surveillance (e.g. tags), only 30% of experienced shoplifters regarded EAS as a concern (Weaver & Carroll, 1985). They then just steal untagged articles (Lasky et al., 2017, p.13). Another common way to escape this system is, for instance, by passing the gates with another person. The thief keeps the stolen goods and continues walking out while the decoy stays to be searched by the employees. This security system relies on the surveillance of employees. When the alarm is triggered, someone

from the shop must go check the departing client. It was observed that in only 18% of cases did a someone from the staff actually approach the customer who had activated the alarm (Hayes & Blackwood, 2006). This is mostly due to the reliability of the alarm. Handford found that 93% of alarm activations were not theft related (cited in Beck & Palmer, 2010). Employees' responsibility to check potential thieves and the task of putting tags on are time-draining and it makes their efficiency at work lower. Therefore, the effectiveness of EAS depends on the system unreliability and staff apathy (Beck & Palmer, 2010).

3) Other:

It was concluded that CPTED practices can reduce crime and the fear of crime (Beck, 2016a; Cozens et al., 2005). This informal surveillance has been positively correlated with higher feelings of security among customers and employees (Kajalo & Lindblom, 2010, pp.300–305). The only negative aspect found is the possible impact on sales. A study led by Farrington, in 1999, noted that moving high-risk products in more secured places may affect their sales in a negative way (cited in Beck, 2016a, p.31).

Special packaging was found to be highly effective against shoplifting. No exact numbers were given but studies showed that it induces an improvement in the theft rate of protected articles (Hayes et al., 2011; Lasky et al., 2017).

PART II Qualitative Analysis

Now that the concept of shoplifting has been described, we saw that the literature already provided some elements of response to the research question: *what are the consequences of shoplifting prevention measures, how do they influence Belgian retail workers?* The following part of the work will seek to answer it directly by looking at the results of twelve interviews.

5. Methodology

5.1. In-depth Interviews

One-to-one, in-depth semi-structured interviews (Ritchie et al., 2013, pp.138-169), will be conducted through an in-person meeting or a video call via Teams. No definitive place has been set, it is left to the preference of the interviewee. Some were conducted in their private home, in the library, in cafés, etc. The duration of the interviews varied between 20 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes. Twelve interviews were conducted as with this number the saturation of information was achieved. Urquhart defines saturation as: ‘the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data’ (as cited in Saunders et al., 2018, p.1895).

5.2. Informant's Profiles

The profile of the informants is a Belgian citizen that works in retail. They must be at least aware of the security systems present in their workplace and aware of the problematic of theft. It doesn't matter what kind of merchandise they sell or what age/region they are. Recruitment will be done through word-of-mouth in my acquaintances circle. Interviews were all conducted in French. The profiles were very diverse on purpose. Seven women and five men, with age varying between 19 and 68. The types of shops were also diverse, three respondents work in clothing stores, two in specialty stores (written detail, shops that sell small specialized items), two in small supermarkets (written supermarket express) and five in large ones.

Table 2 Participants Profiles

NAME	GENDER	AGE	STATUT	CAREER IN DISTRIBUTION	TYPE OF SHOP
ZR	W	23	Manager	2 years	Detail
JF	M	23	Student	1 year	Supermarket
MD	M	26	Student	7 years	Supermarket Express
MJ	W	24	Employee	3 years	Clothing

FA	M	57	Manager	30 years	Supermarket
AD	W	24	Employee	7 years	Clothing
VC	W	49	Manager	25 years	Clothing
MA	W	68	Manager + Accountant	16 years	Supermarket
JE	W	25	Employee	2 years	Supermarket
GM	W	55	Manager	20 years	Detail
MS	M	19	Student	1 years	Supermarket Express
GD	M	24	Student	6 years	Supermarket

5.3. Analysis Method

The semi-structured in-depth interviews will follow an interview guide (see Appendix 2) that will ensure the direction while still allowing flexibility for open discussion. It'll allow the participants to generate new ideas and more in-depth reflection (Ritchie et al., 2013, pp.138-169). Using a funnel approach, the interviews will begin with broad questions introducing the topic of safety in shops. The second part will delve into the issue of theft in the retail sector and its legal implications. The third section will focus specifically on shoplifting in the interviewees' workplaces. The final part of the interview will invite participants to share their personal experiences and reactions. During this segment, questions will also explore their feelings of safety and how protection systems impact their behavior and work practices.

A thematic approach (Buetow, 2010, p.123) was used to analyze the results. Prior codes for this subject are: the security presence, the problematic of theft, the different shoplifting-prevention technologies, the general sense of security at work, past shoplifting experiences and their impacts, the existing laws and their effectiveness, the importance of privacy, the advantages and disadvantages of security measures.

The AI website TurboScribe was used for automatic transcriptions of the interviews. A first proofreading was done to check the accuracy of the transcriptions. During this first part, some thematic analyses were already conducted. Different colors were used to highlight the text, according to the priori codes and into smaller parts, easier to manage (see Appendix 1).

Opinions were then separated manually into categories in an Excel file and compared.

The verbatims used in the results are English translations of the interviewees. Original French citations can be found in the appendix (Appendix 10-21).

6. Results

6.1. Security

To begin the interviews, the general topic of security in the retail sector was addressed. The majority of participants (10 out of 12) believed that security is a significant concern for the sector. They cited several reasons for its importance: societal, as people must feel safe to live well; economic, as customers spend more when they feel secure and lastly, employees' well-being is important for a well-functioning company. The two people who disagreed with the majority both shared the same argument : incidents are exceptional and thus investing in security should not be a central priority for retailers.

When they heard security, eight participants thought of the security related to preventing assaults from misbehaving customers, for instance who are drugged or drunk, as well as security aiming to avoid accidents. However, the primary reaction for most respondents (9 out of 12) was to think about security related to theft. Additionally, several participants (3 out of 12) noted that security is a greater concern in specialized shops with more expensive merchandise, such as luxury brands or technological devices as they are more at risk.

When asked if they think the sense of security differs when you are an employee versus a customer, everybody believes that it does. They all feel that the security for an employee is harder to maintain at all times compared with the one for clients. The feeling of responsibility for the employees was mentioned by six people. As J.F. states: "When you're a client, you don't think about what bad things might happen, but when you're an employee it is different. If there is a dangerous situation happening, firstly you have to deal with this, and secondly, you can't just leave and run".

6.2. Theft

After discussing security, the problem of theft was addressed. Interviewees were asked general questions to evaluate their knowledge on the subject.

1) Major concern?

During this second part, a smaller majority emerged. Only seven interviewees considered it to be a major concern for the retail sector. Of all these people, three expressed that they believe it is a growing problem worsening due to the inflation. They link it with the COVID crisis and

the following rises in prices. The manager in a large supermarket, F.B., confirms it: “it becomes worse and worse every passing year”.

For the five respondents who did not regard theft as a significant concern, the predominant reason was financial. They argued that theft occurs so infrequently that investing in prevention systems is excessively costly and ultimately unnecessary. V.C. agreed to some extent with that opinion, she suggests that sales management and profitability are the primary priorities for retailers.

2) Who is the most impacted?

The theft issue is impacting, according to half of the respondents (6 out of 12), big corporation shops most. Three people said that when you are a small shop you have a loyal customer base and you recognize them. They therefore consider the risks of theft, smaller. V.C. also maintains that bigger shops are less personal and there is no affective link between employee and clients. Bigger spaces are also more difficult to protect, this belief was shared with four other people.

On the other hand, five people believe that smaller shops are an easier target. Their reasoning is that in smaller shops there are fewer employees that can watch you and the surveillance level is lower.

3) Types of theft:

When asked about the different types of theft they were aware of, the responses included:

Table 3 Types of theft

Merchandise theft	Mentioned by 8 people
Theft with violence	Mentioned by 7 people
Employee theft	Mentioned by 5 people
Theft in group/ with an accomplice	Mentioned by 5 people
Cash theft	Mentioned by 3 people
Professional theft	Mentioned by 1 people

6.3. Personal Experiences

The interviews' discussions then shifted to the issue of theft in their personal workplaces.

1) Theft

All the interviewees report experiencing theft, with incidents varying from 5 times a year to multiple occurrences daily. The financial impacts range from 1000€/year to approximately

10.000€/year. In this section, the geographical region appears to be more significant than the kind of shop for participants. The three interviewees working in Brussels experience more thefts than the ones working in other regions in Belgium (Brabant Wallon and Namur).

The primary type of theft experienced by the interviewees is merchandise theft. Thieves often steal products from the shop floor, concealing them under their layers of clothes or in their bags. Hiding products in strollers is also a commonly used tactic. In M.S.'s shop, a recurrent issue is the theft of shop furniture, including signs, chairs, plates, and ashtrays.

2) Stolen Products

In the seven supermarkets interviewed, the most stolen items were alcohol bottles (5), little accessories (4) and make-up (2). M.D. made the assumption that more products are being stolen now because people use less cash, making cash registers less attractive to thieves, who instead target merchandise.

Besides stealing products like customers, employees also steal money and misuse advantages. In J.F.'s shop, over 2000€ was stolen by an employee over the course of one year. In M.A.'s shop, the owner used to take merchandise for their personal consumption and recorded it as inventory loss. M.A. estimated that thousands of euros were gone due to this "fake theft".

3) Incidents

To have a better understanding of their perception of theft, questions about incidents they personally witnessed, were asked. Every respondent had concrete examples to share. F.B. gave at least ten examples, all more unbelievable than the previous. From hiding product in their clothes or in their hair to running through the exit with a full cart, examples were very diverse. A lot of the techniques given by Caime and Ghone (1996) (see section 1.2.), were mentioned and are still used today. The most recurrent one is the use of an accomplice, the use of disguise such as wigs and large robes was also mentioned.

From the five people that mentioned theft with violence, two experienced it themselves. M.D. had a cart pushed in his and his manager's direction while the thieves ran away and V.C. explained how she survived a robbery where she was threatened with a knife. It was mentioned by four people that there is a higher theft rate during the holidays. In this period, they have more sales and therefore have more money present in the store. G.M. explained that they are in frequent contact with the police during this period and even one year, an officer was constantly rounding in the neighbourhood. F.B. hires extra security guards for this period.

6.4. Security Systems

The security systems were discussed in fourth. They first explained what types of security they knew existed, then they always compared to what they have in their workplace. They were asked to give the positive and negative outcomes for each example they gave. This section was very useful to understand the impacts of these systems on their everyday life.

Table 4 Overview of the security systems positive and negative effects

Systems	Cited by	Positive effects	Negative effects
Cameras	12 people	-Dissuasive effects -Relief -Discrete -Reduce employees' theft	-Expensive maintenance -Operational issues -Visibility not always optimal -Need employees' time to watch the footage -Uneasiness when being filmed
EAS	12 people	-Dissuasive effects -Protect the most expensive article	-Time-consuming -Damage article -False alarm/Operational issues -Waste of time to install and check every alarm -Easy to bypass
Employee surveillance	12 people	-Dissuasive effects -No extra investment	-Potential discrimination -Embarrassing when wrong -Create more suspicion -Fear of violence -Takes working time
Security agent	10 people	-Dissuasive effects -Prevent escalation -Security expert on site is a relief -Repression and fear of authority	-Potential discrimination -Expensive -Can make people uncomfortable
CPTED	9 people	-Dissuasive effects -Reassuring	-Can cause temptation (when small candy near the exit, children might take them)
Alarm	5 people	-Dissuasive effects	-False alarm causes stress (e.g. during the night)
Emergency Button	4 people	-Dissuasive effects -Relief to have it -Cheap maintenance	- Check system every six months
Police	4 people	-Direct take care of the problem -Reassuring	-They don't always have time -No punishment -Need time to arrive
Insurances	3 people	-Very common -Reduce the feeling of responsibility	- Additional costs
Mirrors	2 people	-Less expensive -Better visibility	
Cooperation with nearby shops	2 people	-Cheap -Reassuring -Additional source of info	-Illegal to share images from cameras with other people than the police

1) Cameras

Regarding security concerns, surveillance cameras were the first-mentioned systems. With only one out of the twelve shops is lacking cameras, half of the interviewees noted their ubiquity, stating that their widespread presence has diminished the element of surprise. However, in half of the cases, the cameras had operational issues. V.C. explained that for her shop, the cost of repairs outweighed the losses from theft. She wasn't alone—three other respondents had dysfunctional cameras that they chose not to fix for the same reason. Additionally, cameras don't always have the optimal angle and thus have a limited visibility that doesn't cover the entire shop floor.

Another application for the cameras is the monitoring of employees. Four respondents had used cameras above cash registers or in the shop to catch employees stealing. M.A. experienced this positive outcome with cameras: after noticing money disappearing from her office post-accounting, she installed one right above her desk and caught an employee stealing hundreds of euros in the evenings after the shop had closed. Additionally, eight people mentioned that the presence of cameras reassured them as employees. They feel like the footage can be helpful for them as a tangible proof in the case of an accident or if there is any doubt regarding their behavior at work. Cameras also had a reassuring function for the managers, F.B. uses them to check if the alarm goes off during the night.

However, F.B. highlighted a significant downside they faced when installing this type of recording device above the cash registers. Employees were unhappy and he had to deal with complaints and employee unions because of this technology. “They think I watch them work to monitor if they work and if they're fast enough, but I don't”. Five other people shared that feeling of being uneasy when knowing they are on film.

Five people also considered cameras a waste of time since they don't have the resources to review footage every time a theft is suspected. While assigning someone specifically to this task would help, most shops can't afford it. This issue was expressed by J.F.: “it's the problem with cameras, if we want it to be effective, someone has to constantly watch it”.

2) EAS

Electronic Article Surveillance was also brought up in every interview. Present in 9 shops out of 12, its main advantage was the dissuasive effect. People believe that shoplifters will avoid stealing products protected with EAS.

Nevertheless, multiple negative aspects of EAS were discussed. The first is that it is time-consuming. Six shops mentioned that the time spent attaching tags to articles and removing them at checkout isn't worth the investment. For M.J., J.E. and V.C. (workers in clothing shops), the time needed was too excessive so they just put them on expensive articles. The tags make holes in the clothes, so it was not valuable to attach them, but the brand still invest in these tags. False alarms were also a significant issue. Additionally, four people talked about techniques they saw on social media to avoid triggering the alarm, their confidence in this system's efficiency was therefore limited.

3) Human Surveillance

Human surveillance (see section 3.4.b.) is also present in every interview. All participants emphasized the importance of employee vigilance as a key preventative measure. Four interviewees noted that they recognized some repeat offenders and alerted their coworkers to be extra vigilant when these individuals are present. Every staff has developed its own strategies to prevent theft in their shop. In one place, calling "code 50" on the microphone signals the need for assistance. In another, when suspicious behavior is observed, employees relay themselves to discreetly follow the person around the shop.

Having the responsibility to deal with shoplifters bring many feelings, they will be discussed in more details in the next section. Interviewees also linked this responsibility with a waste of time. The time they spend dealing with theft is working time they lose.

4) Security Guards

Almost all interviewees consider security guards as one of the best preventive systems. The repression and fear of authority are the main advantages to have a physical person that represent security present on site. Having someone specially trained to deal with this kind of issue represents a relief mentioned by four people.

Six interviewees explained some negative aspects of these guards. The cost was the main problem. Most of the shops cannot handle the price of having to hire an extra person for security for the entire year. Another possible problem was raised by J.F.: "Security guard might exacerbate the discrimination in the shops. One time I've been stopped by a guard, even though I was innocent and it made me feel really bad although I did nothing wrong". This concern for discrimination was shared with three other people.

5) Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Some informal surveillance was also mentioned during interviews. CPTED was brought up by many people (9 out of 12). Although respondents didn't always realize it is a prevention measure in itself. For instance, multiple shops keep sensitive products, such as alcohol bottles or expensive items, near the cash register, in the back-room or at least in sight of the employees. Another example is some shops limit the exit way for customers with special one-way doors. M.J. has in her shop special protective doors to access the cash registers.

6) Other

A few other methods were discussed by a smaller number of people. Only two people mentioned mirrors and two others the cooperation between closely located shops. V.C. found this solidarity with other neighboring shops very reassuring. After her assault, it was other retailers that called the cops and took care of her. She explained that another thing that reassured her after the robbery was the emergency button. This triggers a silent alarm connected directly to the police and they arrive shortly after. This system is checked a couple of times a year and according to V.C., it is the most "cost-effective" security, three other people mentioned having a button like this.

The police was also mentioned by four people. A possible negative impact of calling the police on the brand was brought up by J.F. He believed that if the police comes to deal with shoplifting every time it happens, clients might see the police often. They might think that this place is not safe and be reminded of the potential dangers. Furthermore it was brought up that people think that the police is not very interested in dealing with shoplifters as it is not considered a "big crime". When F.B. contacted them after catching a thief, the police arrived and told him: "we can take him to the station but in 30 minutes he'll probably be out".

Specially designed packaging such as cable restraining the pulling of articles were mentioned by five people, but not developed.

6.5. Psychological Impacts

The last part of the interviews was dedicated to understanding the consequences of shoplifting. Their feelings and reactions when facing a shoplifting were discussed. The main impacts (collected in table 5) show that a significant proportion of feelings expressed towards shoplifting are negative.

Table 5 Feelings toward shoplifting

	Neutral	Positive		Negative				
PSYCHOLOGICAL SHOPLIFTING IMPACTS	Unphased	Empowerment	pride	stress	anger	responsibility feeling	fear (of violence)	frustration
Mentioned by number of people	5	1	1	7	4	4	7	2
Negative								
embarrassed	suspicion	indigent	betrayal (of clients)	crazy	lack of trust	pressure	Annoying	Scared of legal repercussion
2	5	1	1	3	1	1	2	5

Shoplifting creates mixed feelings among employees, predominantly negative. The most commonly reported emotions were stress (7), suspicion (5), fear of legal repercussion (5), anger (4), and a sense of responsibility falling on the employees' shoulders (4). When dealing with a situation in their store, violence is an outcome feared (7 out of 12).

Many employees feel a sentiment of responsibility towards the shop (6 out of 12). Four of them worked in shops with a family-like atmosphere and know personally the owner. They feel like it is on them to try and prevent theft for the owner's sake. The feeling of responsibility seems to be less present with employees of big corporations: "I don't feel that it is my job to do that [catch thieves], if they want to arrest people, they need to hire specialized security people that know how to deal with this and are trained for it" argued G.D. This exact feeling was shared with three other people and all of them working in big brand stores.

Following theft incidents, six individuals reported changes in their behavior. They now have raised their level of attention and suspicion when looking at customers. As V.C. explained, "Now I trust my instincts more. I'm probably more attentive, especially if people are wearing large clothes".

A feeling also mentioned was frustration. Frustration with the law that they find too restrictive, even though none of the interviewee knew about the exact legal restrictions to thefts prevention. Some of them knew they couldn't use the footage of the cameras to share on social media. Four of them knew they cannot force people to stay in the building. Only four were aware that to accuse someone of stealing, this person must be caught red-handed

after the crime. The frustration emerged when they couldn't just act on reasonable suspicion and had to wait until tangible proof.

Three people felt that some stricter laws should be implemented for the safety of employees and to reduce theft. Being able to search the bags, being allowed to share the images of the thieves with other stores nearby were offered as new ideas. Stricter laws for recidivists were also unanimously agreed on.

The absence of security is something that raises eyebrows for customers, according to J.F. The presence of prevention systems created relief and reassurance. This belief was shared by half of the interviewees.

Other respondents have more unaffected reactions. "it happens so often that you get used to it" said F.B. Six people initially said their behavior wasn't impacted, but during further discussion, three of them revealed that they pay more attention now, though they don't attribute it to any specific incident. Two people explained that they don't have any particular feelings of insecurity and haven't changed their behavior at work, even after witnessing thefts. They couldn't provide specific reasons for this, except that they feel it's pointless to be scared of something that happens so rarely.

Paradoxically, a positive sentiment in reaction to shoplifting emerged in two interviews. V.C. phrased it as a sense of pride. They felt proud and empowered when they can prevent a crime.

6.6. Reactions

Only a third of the interviewees said they act themselves when facing a theft. When V.C. feels unsafe, she yells, and that usually suffice to make the thieves go away. Most respondents that engage with thieves, give them an opportunity to claim it was an honest mistake and they simply forgot. When they are almost certain that a theft was committed, they ask the potential culprit to show them the inside of their bags.

The majority of respondents (7 out of 12) emphasized the cautious approach they need to take when dealing with suspected theft, arguing that it must be handled thoughtfully. "You can't accuse someone in an aggressive way, if you might be wrong so you need to be very careful", said M.A. This adds an extra layer of considerations employees that must also keep on their mind.

F.B., as a manager in a large store, pushes his employees to do nothing, "if he [the thief] wants my sweater, he can have it, the store is insured for these kinds of incidents". He

explained that he doesn't want the scare to escalate into paranoia. Employees being suspicious with everybody and accusing innocent people might be damaging for the brand. These seven people constantly consider the possibility of being wrong, and thus, they temper their reactions when dealing with potential theft. Five people shared this cautious mentality and added a fear of repercussions. They are scared that if they go after the thieves and this person gets injured, it might backfire on them legally.

Another common reaction among respondents is seeking support from others. Four women specifically mentioned their fear of being alone when dealing with thieves. When confronted with theft, five people seek assistance from a manager or coworker to handle the situation together.

When looking at the condemnation of shoplifting, respondents were in the majority in the "depends on the situation" category (10 out of 12). It depends on the reasons for the theft. If they need it to survive, 4 people feel that a lighter punishment can be pronounced. The two interviewees that were stricter, F.B. and M.A. (also the people with the longest careers in retail) felt that theft is condemnable whatever the reasons. "It is sad to steal to eat, but for us this is our livelihood" explains F.B. Some respondents believe that punishments should vary based on the type of thief and the recurrence of the crime. Using Moore's classification of shoplifters, interviewees' opinions on appropriate punishments can be separated.

Impulse shoppers were strictly condemned by the same two strict individuals, while everyone else felt that people could make mistakes and shouldn't be punished too harshly. Occasional shoplifters faced more frequent condemnation (from five respondents), as social pressure was not considered a sufficient reason for stealing. Three respondents mentioned deliberately scaring young thieves to deter them from reoffending. Episodic thieves were mentioned by four people. Three people expressed a compassionate understanding of the mental illnesses that can lead to theft, whereas G.M. had encountered a kleptomaniac who stole merchandise worth hundreds of euros. She thus felt less lenient in such cases. The final two categories, professional and recurrent thieves, were equally condemned by interviewees. Participants did not differentiate between these types, as the recurrence of theft was uniformly and strictly condemned by all.

7. Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand how security measures impact the lives of Belgian retail employees. In this next section, we will have a look at the results of the interviews and how they differ from what was present in the literature review. A recapitulative table can be found in the appendices (see Appendix 3).

Firstly, it should be noted that the distinction between man and woman does not appear to be significantly different in the results. Same goes for the size of the shops or the age of the respondents. The number of years spent in distribution may have an impact on the attitudes towards theft as the two strictest interviewees were the two with the longest career in retail.

An additional point to be noted is that only F.B. talked about new tagging technologies. He explained that during the remodel of the shop they're going to add facial recognition software to the usual cameras. He believed that it'll probably have fewer disadvantages for employees but couldn't confirm it for sure. No interviewee knew about the new tagging technologies as for instance RFID and the advantages they bring (such as more discretion and no hole in articles). Impacts of the new technologies were thus not addressed in this work.

7.1. Security Systems Negative Impacts

When discussing about how security systems impact their lives, interviewees almost immediately explained all negative downsides

A lower vigilance from employees (see section 4.4.c.) because of security presence was not mentioned by interviewees. Neither was the fact of being reminded of the risks. The concept of displacement (see section 3.2.) also was not present in the interviews. Three general negative aspects emerged.

7.1.a. The cost problem:

Shoplifting brings multiple types of costs for retailers, revenue lost, damage costs, operating costs, administrative costs, costs of security investment, etc. (Burrows, 1991). When discussing various security measures (see table 2), this cost problem was always the first mentioned. As brought up in the theory, it was hard for interviewees to choose the best cost-effective solution with an interesting return on investment for their stores. These costs are the primary reasons why many cameras are not operational or monitored 24/7, and why security

guards are not employed year-round. Examples cited by interviewees are investment and maintenance expenses, along with the salaries for these types of security personnel.

7.1.b. The waste of time:

Apart from the cost issue, the primary downside mentioned during the interviews was the waste of time, it was noted by nine participants and goes along with the theory. This problem in the work efficiency can take many forms (Hocquelet, 2013). It was mentioned mainly in relation with the human surveillance, the use of cameras and EAS. This also concerns CPTED when needing work hours to rearrange the shop to keep valuable goods close and having to get up every time a customer requests an item kept in a secure location. The time waste stems from multiple aspects. Six people also considered cameras a waste of time since they don't have the resources to review footage every time a theft is suspected. While assigning someone specifically to this task would help, most shops can't afford it.

It was observed that in only a small percentage of cases, did someone from the staff actually approach the customer who had activated the alarm (see section 4.4.c.). This tendency was confirmed during seven interviews where they admitted they don't check every time the alarm goes off because it is so often a false alarm, making it a considerable time drain. This confirms the reduction in the confidence some store staff have in the system seen previously in the theory (see section 4.4.c.). The shrinkage levels found previously could not be confirmed in this work. Interviewees noticed a change but not as significant.

7.1.c. The fear of embarrassment, legal repercussions or violence:

Retailers count a lot on employees to prevent shoplifting. This human surveillance is completely dependent on their role of guardians and their willingness to intervene (Shi et al., 2022).

One of the main concerns brought up during interviews with the intervention of employees is being embarrassed when they wrongly accuse an innocent shopper because of a false alarm. Or embarrassing the client that might then not want to come back to the shop. This fact is not very present in the literature and is rarely listed as a consequence of shoplifting prevention.

Being scared of possible legal repercussions was also not present in the shoplifting literature for this work. This point was raised by almost the half of the participants and can therefore not be ignored. When they feel a responsibility to act, interviewees explained that they are not

sure what legally they can or not do, consequently they prefer not to risk any legal fallbacks and limit their intervention.

As we saw in section 4.2., employees are to more at risks of being violated when facing shoplifting. Interviewees are aware of this fact and fear this possible outcome. When they suspect a shoplifter, this fear of violence might dictate their reactions.

7.2. Security Systems Positive Impacts

Even though, when discussing about how security systems impact their lives, interviewees first explained with more details about the negative downsides, their overall feelings were positive. They all said they feel more secure when they have them. We will also compare 3 main positive consequences of security systems with the previous theory.

7.2.a. Reassuring:

In the theory, informal surveillance was found to increase the feeling of safety of employees. This fact was confirmed by the presence of the term reassuring in many interviews. They also used it to describe formal surveillance, which was not mentioned in the theory. It was used by 10 people to describe the general sentiments when thinking about security measures. For instance, cameras were reassuring for employees as they feel they can rely on them in case of a problem. CPTED helped workers feel more in control of their workplace, enhancing their confidence. Additionally, of all people mentioning CPTED, nobody mentioned any impacts on the sales. All experiences were reassuring and positive.

Both the theory and the interviewees were quite vague about the reasons behind this reassuring feeling with only one given explanation. Employees can use the footage to protect themselves. No further insights were present in the literature or during the interviews, and when asked to elaborate, participants did not give other specific reasons for this reassurance.

7.2.b. The dissuasive effect:

In the theory, the only mention of dissuasive effect was with cameras, as they are used as a deterrence against shoplifters.

During the interview, the dissuasive effect was always seen as a positive outcome of security systems. Retailers feel that the security presence they have, is sufficient and they are mainly effective relying on this effect. It helps reduce the occurrence of theft. This strategy was mentioned by ten people, either with cameras, CPTED, guards, employee's presence or

electronic tags. They feel that the presence of any system is sufficient to fulfill their need for security. Operational defects of cameras did also not appear to be a hassle when we overlook the cost. Their mere presence had believed effects both on stealing employees and thieves.

7.2.c. The feeling of pride/empowerment:

Empowerment feeling after stopping a crime, as mentioned by V.C. when she managed to prevent a shoplifting incident, is something studied in criminology literature, but never linked with shoplifting consequences.

7.3. *Security Systems Neutral Impacts*

Interviewees mentioned the commonness (seen previously in the theory) of theft and of security presence. Three people explained that they don't feel unsafe in their workplace even with shoplifting happening, they therefore don't have particular feelings towards security measures.

8. Managerial implications

At this stage of the work, both literature review and practical discussions with Belgian workers have provided valuable information. These insights will assist retail workers from all levels in their efforts against shoplifting.

8.1. Owner:

Owners bear the responsibility to evaluate the need for security in their shop. They need to analyze their prevention and adequately invest in security systems (see section 3.2). As we saw in section 3.4.b., shoplifters consider the design of the shop as a factor in their decision to steal (Cardone & Hayes, 2012, p.37). In the preliminary phase, during the design of the shop, decisions can be taken to limit the possibilities of theft. For instance, creating wider aisles, placing most precious items in sight of employees, limiting the exits, keeping expensive products behind the counter, etc. Planning this process ahead of time can reduce costs and save time compared to implementing it in a later stage.

The presence of security device has dissuasive effects and is proven to be effective.

Employees as guardians, cameras and security guards are the most often thought off, but can be pricy. Fake cameras might be enough if the owner believes the investment in real ones is too substantial. Owners can also enlist the services of external auditors, whose objective

perspectives can help identify and reduce internal theft. Hiring security services to monitor financial operations and employee behavior, can deter employees from succumbing to theft temptation.

8.2. Manager:

Managers responsibilities are more “employees’ supervision” oriented. Internal theft is a scourge and needs to be dealt with to limit damages. The time invested in educating and raising awareness of employees can be beneficial (National Retail Federation, 2023, p.15).

Training employees on how to react when they witness shoplifting will also bring a positive outcome for external theft. Having tools and protocols to deal with potential situations might help employees feel more secured and feel less fear when something happens. Additionally, after a shoplifting incident, providing psychological support can help reduce negative emotional impacts found in the study and the theory.

With their acting position on the field, managers have direct contact with employees and clients. They can use their influence to update and adjust security measures based on their observations and on feedback they get from employees or clients.

Lastly, CRAVED items are the most susceptible to theft (see section 1.1.). They need special protection and more attention. Specifically designed packaging, secured area and restricted access are examples of preventive strategies that could be easy to implement. Managers need to identify these kinds of products and implement loss prevention systems to protect these items in priority.

8.3. Shop-floor employee:

Employees’ focus is essential in the fight against shoplifting. As seen in theory and during the interviews, human attention is the first and most present protection system. Multiple interviewees mentioned that even subconsciously they felt when a behavior is not normal. Sometimes trusting your instincts is effective. Constant vigilance and reporting suspicious behavior to managers are pillars of human surveillance. The manner in which you react must also follow an established protocol. Staying calm and controlling your reactions are essential when dealing with a potentially dangerous situation.

PART III Conclusion

9. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Firstly, shoplifting is a difficult crime to investigate. A lot of data and numbers included in documents are only based on thieves that were caught. These incidents are the visible part of the iceberg, the exact number of thefts is almost impossible to calculate and can be much larger than the estimates.

Secondly, a lot of documentation used in the literature review is not recent. This oldness brings downside as it is always the most accurate. All new technologies such as IA and facial recognition are not mentioned in scientific papers. In the past few years, the retail sector has greatly evolved. Self-checkout shops have dramatically changed the behavior of customers. Now shops with this type of exit are even bigger victims of theft (Dickinson, 2020). This technological evolution could be the subject of a dedicated study.

Finally, the qualitative approach might be “too large”. The great diversity of profiles did not create categories of an impactful size. For instance, the Brussels-area workers were underrepresented with only three employees. The common belief was that the shoplifting rate in Brussels is higher than in other regions in Belgium. This fact was not confirmed by the statistics presented by the federal police (see table1). Reasons behind these numbers could be looked at.

10. Conclusion

The goal of this master thesis was to understand the consequences of security measures against shoplifting on Belgian employees.

A review of the existing literature on shoplifting consequences highlights the widespread nature of this issue, revealing that one in eleven consumers is a shoplifter. It also delves into the underlying characteristics of shoplifters.

To combat this growing problem, Belgian retailers have invested approximately 400 million euros. Shoplifting impact financially both clients with the crime tax and retailers with various types of costs. Additionally to financial impacts, it also creates psychological consequences

on clients and employees. Stress, irritability and a fear of violence were noted by multiple studies. Shoplifting drives customers to shop elsewhere and complicates employees' lives.

These outcomes highlight the need for cost-effective shoplifting prevention measures that take into consideration both the financial and the human elements. Different possibilities for security systems were presented. CPTED, human surveillance, cameras and EAS were the most frequently studied in previous academic papers.

Impacts and the efficiency of these security systems were then brought up. What came out of it for clients is a general reassuring feeling but with a possible discrimination and less control of their privacy. The impact on employees are less often studied. Human surveillance makes workers' job more difficult with a loss in efficiency and more costs. But an upside observed is the use of camera's footage to support them if needed. The effectiveness of the loss prevention systems was generally noted with a reduction in loss rates after the installation particularly for cameras and EAS. The waste of time and the ability to just avoid the systems are two other downsides often mentioned in the theory.

The twelve interviews confirmed some of the theory and gave us new insights on the impacts of shoplifting prevention systems on Belgian employees. General opinions on security systems were positive. They reassure employees with their presence and dissuade potential theft. Negative impacts were discussed in more details. The most predominant downsides were costs that retailers have to bear, the waste of time these systems might incur and fears, fear of embarrassment, fear of violence and a fear of legal repercussions.

In conclusion, even though shoplifting prevention systems generate overall positive sentiments, the downsides may be burdens in employees' lives. This research helps to understand the complex challenge of finding an optimal balance between shoplifting prevention measures and their impact on employees.

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