

## Tekst 4

# Swarming the shelves

A TRIP to the supermarket may not seem like an exercise in psychological warfare—but it is. Shopkeepers know that filling a store with the aroma of freshly baked bread makes people feel hungry and persuades them to buy more food than they had intended. Stocking the most expensive products at eye level makes them sell faster than cheaper but less visible competitors. Now researchers are investigating how “swarm intelligence” (that is, how ants, bees or any social animal, including humans, behave in a crowd) can be used to influence what people buy.

At a recent conference in Rome, Zeeshan-ul-hassan Usmani, a computer scientist from Princeton University, described a new way to 10 impulse buying using this phenomenon. Supermarkets already encourage shoppers to buy things they did not realise they wanted: for instance, by placing 11 at the back of the store, forcing shoppers to walk past other tempting goods to reach them.

Dr Usmani and Ronaldo Menezes of the Florida Institute of Technology set out to enhance this tendency to buy more by playing on the herd instinct. The idea is that, if a certain product is seen to be popular, shoppers are likely to choose it too. The challenge is to keep customers informed about what others are buying. 12, enter smart-cart technology! In Dr Usmani's supermarket every product has a radio frequency identification tag, a sort of barcode that uses radio waves to transmit information, and every trolley has a scanner that reads this information and relays it to a central computer. As a customer walks past a shelf of goods, a



screen on the shelf keeps him updated from minute to minute on 13 have chosen that particular product. If there are many, he is more likely to select it too.

Dr Usmani's “swarm-moves” model appeals to supermarkets because it increases sales without the costly need to give people 14. And it gives shoppers the satisfaction of knowing that they bought the “right” product—that is, the one everyone else bought. The model has not yet been tested widely in the real but Dr Usmani says that both Wal-Mart in America and Tesco in Britain are interested in his work.

Another recent study on the power of social influence indicates that sales could, indeed, be boosted in this way. Matthew Salganik of Columbia University in New York and his colleagues have described creating an artificial music market in which some 14,000 people downloaded previously unknown songs. The researchers found that when people could see the songs ranked by how many times they had been downloaded, they followed the crowd. When the songs were not ordered by rank, but only the number of times they had been downloaded was displayed, the effect of social influence was still there but was 15. People

thus follow the herd when it is easy for them to do so.

In Japan a chain of convenience shops has been ordering its products according to sales data. The shops sell only the most popular items in each product category, and the rankings are updated weekly.

And the psychology that works in physical stores is just as potent on the internet. Online retailers such as Amazon are adept at telling shoppers which products are popular with like-minded consumers. 16 in the privacy of your home, you can still be part of the swarm.

*The Economist*

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*Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.*

1p 10

- A advertise
- B increase
- C prevent
- D research

1p 11

- A everyday items
- B expensive brands
- C non-food articles
- D slow-selling products

1p 12

- A Even so
- B Moreover
- C Nevertheless
- D Therefore

1p 13

- A how many consumer organisations
- B how many people currently in the shop
- C the various reasons why other customers
- D whether many advertising companies

1p 14

- A a say
- B discounts
- C explanations
- D guarantees
- E options

1p 15

- A equally artificial
- B just as strong
- C less pronounced
- D more noticeable

1p 16

- A At least
- B Besides,
- C Even
- D Likewise,
- E Yet