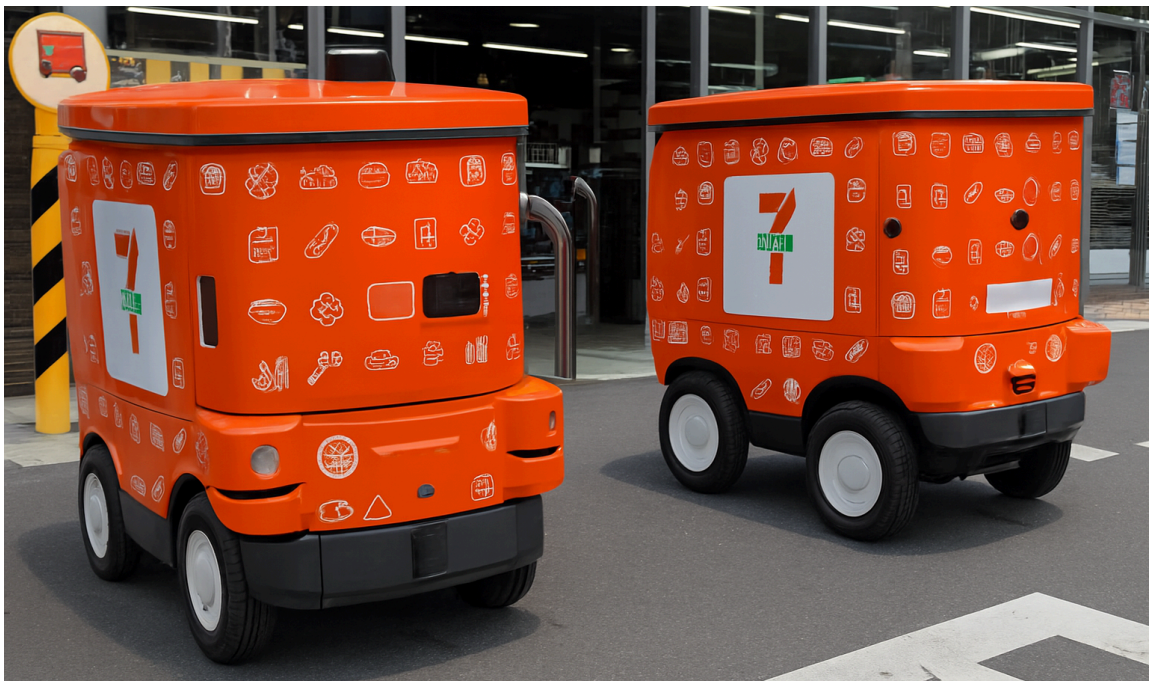


Robots at 7-Eleven Tokyo

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. **shortage** (noun) /'ʃɔːr.tɪdʒ/ – A lack of something that is needed.
Example: Japan faces a shortage of workers.
2. **restock** (verb) /ˌrɪː'stɒk/ – To put new supplies of goods onto shelves.
Example: The clerk needs to restock the drinks.
3. **virtual** (adjective) /'vɜː.tʃu.əl/ – Existing only on a computer or screen, not physically.
Example: The store uses a virtual clerk to help customers.
4. **remote** (adjective) /rɪ'moʊt/ – Done from a distance, without being physically present.
Example: Staff can give remote customer service using a screen.
5. **reduce** (verb) /rɪ'duːs/ – To make something smaller or less.
Example: Robots can reduce the workload of human staff.
6. **aging** (adjective) /'eɪ.dʒɪŋ/ – Becoming older; relating to old age.
Example: Japan has an aging population.
7. **autonomous** (adjective) /ɔː'tɒn.ə.məs/ – Able to work or move without being controlled by a person.
Example: The autonomous delivery robot drives itself on sidewalks..



Japan's 7-Eleven chain is now testing robot workers to help with daily store tasks, as the country faces a serious worker shortage. At present, the robots are only being tested at one Tokyo store, even though 7-Eleven has nearly 22,000 stores nationwide.

The test store has robots that clean floors twice a day and wash windows. Another robot restocks drink shelves using AI and sales data to know which drinks are running low.

The store also features a self-checkout register and a screen with a virtual store clerk. Real staff working remotely at other stores can appear on the screen, answer customer

questions, and even give multilingual assistance to foreign shoppers.

According to the company, robots and the virtual clerk can reduce human staff's workload by 20% to 30%. If the test in Tokyo is successful, more stores in Japan will introduce them.

Japan is facing a serious labor crisis because of its shrinking and aging population, with almost 30% of people now over 65 years old. Many companies see robots as one solution to fill the gap left by fewer younger workers.

Earlier this year, 7-Eleven also tested autonomous delivery robots in western Tokyo. These box-shaped robots travel on sidewalks to deliver store products directly to customers' homes.

7-Eleven hopes these delivery robots can especially support older customers who struggle to go out shopping. The test will continue until February, when the company will decide if the service should expand.

DISCUSSION

1. Would you feel comfortable shopping in a store run partly by robots? Why or why not?
2. Do you think robots make shopping easier or less personal?
3. How could a virtual clerk help you if you were shopping abroad?
4. What kind of store task do you think robots are best suited for?
5. Do you think reducing staff workload by 30% is a good thing or could it harm workers' jobs?
6. How should a country balance using robots with creating jobs for people?
7. If you could design a delivery robot, what special features would you give it?