

Savanta:



# Consumer experiences of network outages

Findings report for the Communications  
Consumer Panel

April 2025

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**Make Better Decisions**

# Introduction and research objectives

The Communications Consumer Panel (CCP) commissioned qualitative research to understand the experience of customers that have been impacted by network outages that effect communications services.

This report provides a detailed understanding of the experiences and concerns of UK consumers and micro-businesses.

## 01

Understanding the types of outages, their durations, and the harm they can cause

## 02

What communication consumers receive and at what stages, alongside an understanding of whether the communications were adequate

## 03

How do these outages impact different types of consumer groups

## 04

What consumers believe can be improved going forward

# Method and sample



## **Aim**

The Communications Consumer Panel (CCP) commissioned qualitative research to understand the experience of customers that have been impacted by network outages that effect communications services.



## **Sample**

Savanta worked with CCP to develop a robust recruitment screener to capture a sample with a range of relevant characteristics and a variety of experiences on network outages. These included sampling by age, country, gender, digital exclusion, caring responsibilities, disabilities and health conditions.



## **Method**

Savanta conducted 45 IDIs with members of the UK public.

Of which 38 were done online, 7 were completed in-person in homes and places of work.



## **Dates**

The interviews took place over 6 weeks from the 10<sup>th</sup> of February to 21<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

# Executive Summary



## Understanding the types of outages, their durations, and the harm they can cause

The report identifies several types of outages that affect consumers, including those caused by weather conditions, power cuts, technical issues, and provider errors. Each of these has varying implications and consumer responses.

Weather-related outages tend to bring about more consumer patience, as the circumstances are perceived to be beyond the control of providers. Power outages not only disrupt internet services but also impede access to other essential utilities such as heat and electricity.

Technical issues are acknowledged by consumers as inevitable, yet they still cause frustration primarily due to the lack of detailed information provided about the nature of the problem. Provider errors are perceived to be the most avoidable type of outage, leading to significant dissatisfaction among consumers.

Outages have both a practical impact on people's day to day lives but also has emotional impacts.

Professional responsibilities are significantly disrupted, with some consumers unable to perform their work duties, which can directly affect their livelihoods. The interruption also extends to essential daily services and leisure, from disabling smart home functions to halting access to entertainment.

So too, loss of communication and social connectivity leaves individuals isolated and unable to reach family and friends.

# Executive Summary



## What communication consumers receive and at what stages, alongside an understanding of whether the communications were adequate

Communication received by consumers both during and after outages is marked by inconsistency, particularly for unplanned disruptions. Consumers frequently report a lack of real-time updates, which leads to uncertainty and substantial frustration.

The adequacy of communication is often questioned due to the untimely and inaccurate nature of the messages received. Notifications frequently arrive late and do not accurately reflect the current status or expected resolution of the outage.

Consumers express a preference for immediate and direct communication channels, such as text messages and emails, appreciating their speed and accessibility.

However, messages frequently lack the specific details needed to make informed decisions, such as the nature of the issue and the estimated time for resolution. Details are particularly critical for business owners who need to manage clients and keep them informed during service disruptions.

The general consensus is that more detailed, clear, and timely information would significantly improve consumers' ability to navigate outages.

# Executive Summary



## How these outages impact different types of consumer groups

Outages affect different consumer groups in diverse ways. Mobile service outages are the second most disruptive following broadband issues but can usually be mitigated when consumers have access to broadband at home. Conversely, landline and Pay-TV outages are the least impactful as very few consumers rely on these services as their primary mode of communication or recreation.

Working professionals face significant setbacks due to interruptions in their workflow, especially those working from home who might have to resort to using mobile hotspots or shifting to public places with reliable Wi-Fi, such as cafés and libraries. Rural residents are notably more affected due to less reliable network services and often have fewer alternatives to mitigate the impact of outages.

For individuals with caring responsibilities and disabilities, outages pose additional challenges and often heightened emotions too.

When access to these services is lost, often care providers experienced the individuals with learning disabilities they care for found it difficult to understand and adapt to changes brought about by the outage. They also found it difficult to manage emotions in these moments too.

For individuals with disabilities who took part in the research, they also raised concerns regarding the impact of not being able to contact people should they need to, leading to particularly stressful experiences.

# Executive Summary



## What consumers believe can be improved going forward

Consumers above all emphasise the necessity for advance notice and transparency from service providers about both planned and unplanned outages. Effective and timely updates, including the cause, affected areas, and estimated resolution times, are crucial. Preferred communication methods include text messages, emails, and app notifications, adopting a multi-channel approach to reach all affected users. This proactive communication reduces uncertainty, allowing consumers to plan and manage their expectations.

Additionally, consumers suggest that compensation for significant outages, especially those lasting more than 24 hours, should become standard practice. Compensation could be in the form of bill credits, reduced charges, or vouchers.

Service providers are urged to invest in robust networks and infrastructure, focusing on preventing outages and improving connectivity, particularly in rural areas prone to weather-related disruptions.

Consumers also highlight the challenges of reaching knowledgeable customer service representatives during outages, recommending streamlined support processes and empathetic responses. Some also suggested having dedicated channels for contact on outages.

Specific households with additional needs, such as individuals in vulnerable circumstances or micro businesses, should receive prioritised attention and specialised support plans. This would help mitigate the impact of outages and ensure that these households receive the necessary attention and solutions.

# The impact of and experiences during network outages



# Staying connected is vital for people's everyday lives

“

I think it is very essential. I mean, at the end of the day, our lives are organised by our devices. As I say, banking, I book my Sainsbury's shop every week, you know, I haven't been to a bank branch-, my local one, I think, I'm Ulster Bank, the local one is still available, but now in our town, a lot of the branches have closed.”

**Mobile and Broadband, Urban, Northern Ireland**



# People's dependency centres around four key areas for which they rely on their connections to internet access in particular



## Work and Professional Responsibilities

Many people relied heavily on broadband for professional purposes, including working from home, conducting virtual meetings, and managing businesses. For this a reliable internet connection is essential for them being able to do so. This is particularly the case for those who have microbusinesses whose livelihood is linked to their ability to have an internet connection when they need it.



## Communication and Social Connectivity

Broadband and mobile services are vital for keeping in touch with family and friends. These services enable routine social interactions and are especially important during emergencies or significant events. The access to this was also important for preventing feelings of isolation for people, particularly those living alone or in isolated rural locations. Landline services however were less commonly relied upon amongst all groups.



## Entertainment and Leisure

Many people depended on broadband for entertainment, such as streaming movies, watching TV shows, and online gaming. These activities are integral to their daily routines and provide much-needed relaxation. There was acceptance amongst many participants that this recreational use was less essential to them. However, for some of those with caring responsibilities for those with learning difficulties or neurodiversity find services like streaming very important to supporting them in their responsibilities.



## Essential Daily Services

Broadband is crucial for handling daily activities like online banking, shopping, and accessing healthcare and educational resources. With service provision increasingly only accessible online, the loss of an internet connection prevents people being able to complete these tasks. Alternatives were often inconvenient for people to access or not available at all.

# Communication services are as vital to some consumers as utilities like energy, gas and water

**01** For some consumers, communication outages mean they are not able to complete crucial tasks like banking or bill paying, make a living or manage their caring responsibilities. Connection to communication services, in particular access to the internet, is vital for them.

**02** Even though all participants in this research relied on staying connected to communication services for everyday tasks, some feel they are less important than other utilities like energy, gas or water. The loss of connection to broadband and mobile services is viewed as more of an inconvenience to them.



“

But yes, I'd lose water any day rather than internet connection, and gas. I don't mind being cold, as long as I've got electricity and I'm connected to the internet, at least we can operate.”



Mobile  
Urban, Scotland

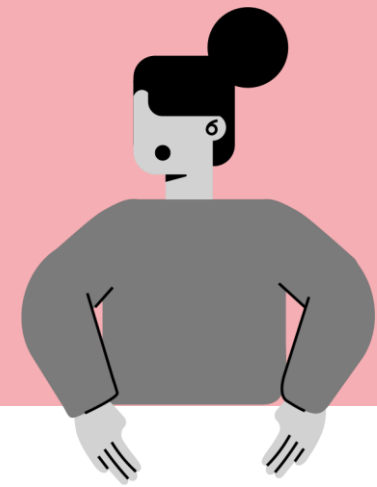
So, having connectivity is critical and also socially, of course. You know, who doesn't have a phone now and isn't on their smartphone?”



Mobile and Broadband  
Remote, England



# The practical impact upon people of outages ranged by how they interact with it



## Work and Professional Responsibilities

Outages prevented people from working, often having direct impacts on people's livelihoods:

*"It was essential for me to actually take money, take deposits, confirm flights for people."* Mobile and Broadband, Remote, England



## Communication and Social Connectivity

For many outages left them isolated without being able to contact family and friends:

*"Broadband because...I use WhatsApp call just to have longer conversations with family members."* Mobile, Rural, England



## Entertainment and Leisure

For many it resulted in them losing access to their usual sources of entertainment:

*"We couldn't watch the TV, we couldn't do anything. We couldn't use our phones for anything, nothing. Everything was down..."* Mobile and Broadband, Rural, Scotland



## Essential Daily Services

Even the most mundane of day-to-day tasks were prevented because of outages:

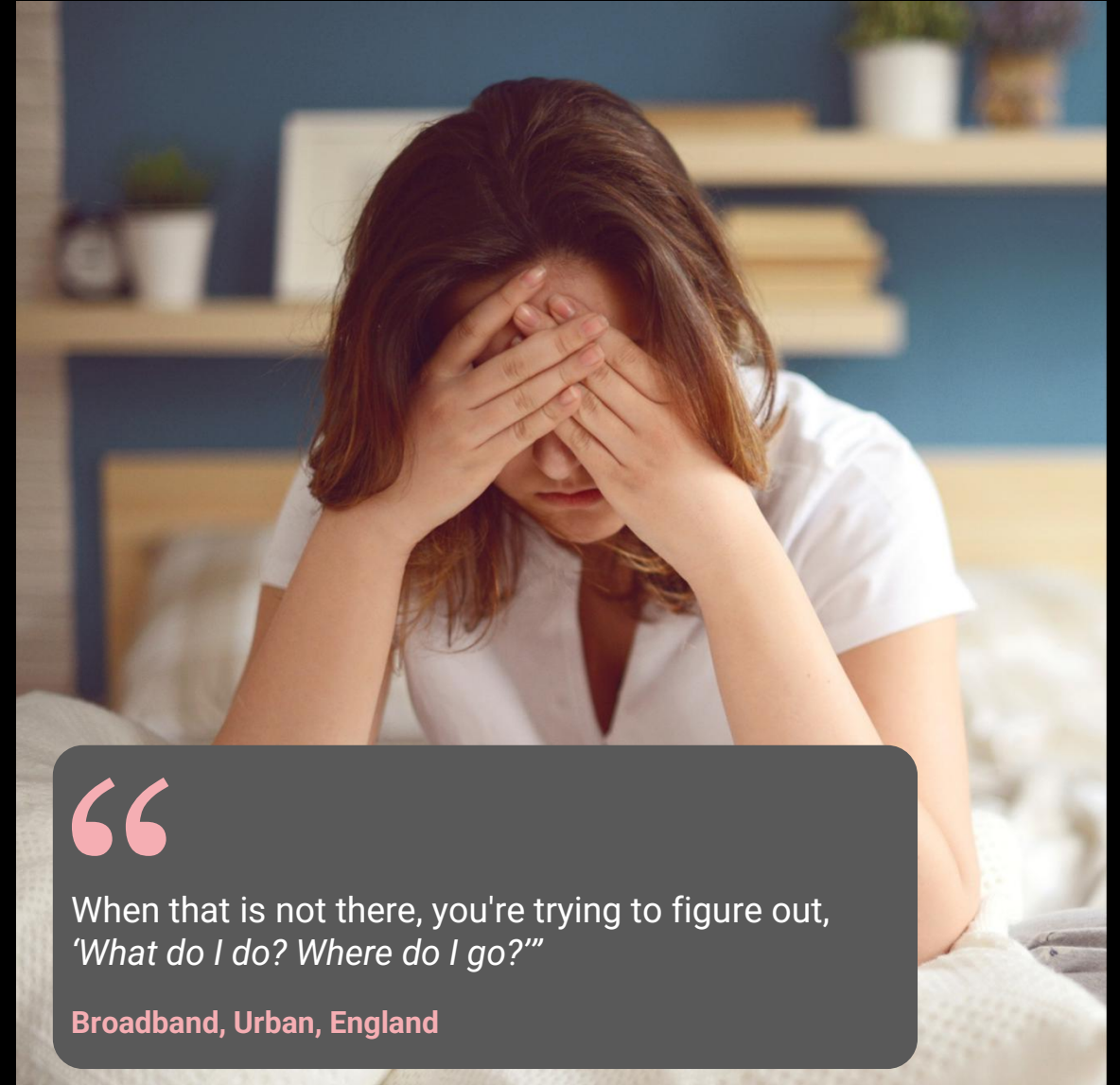
*"So, with no broadband I had to turn the lightbulbs off myself. Alexa wouldn't do that for me."* Mobile and Broadband, Urban, Scotland

# The emotional impact outages had on people were also an important factor of their experience

In addition to the practical impacts upon people of not having access to communication services due to outages, many people who took part in this research also mentioned the emotional impact which it had on them.

The impact of losing these services which they rely on, often without prior warning, had a range of emotional impacts for people:

- » Confusion
- » Frustration and anger
- » Stress and anxiety
- » Isolation and helplessness

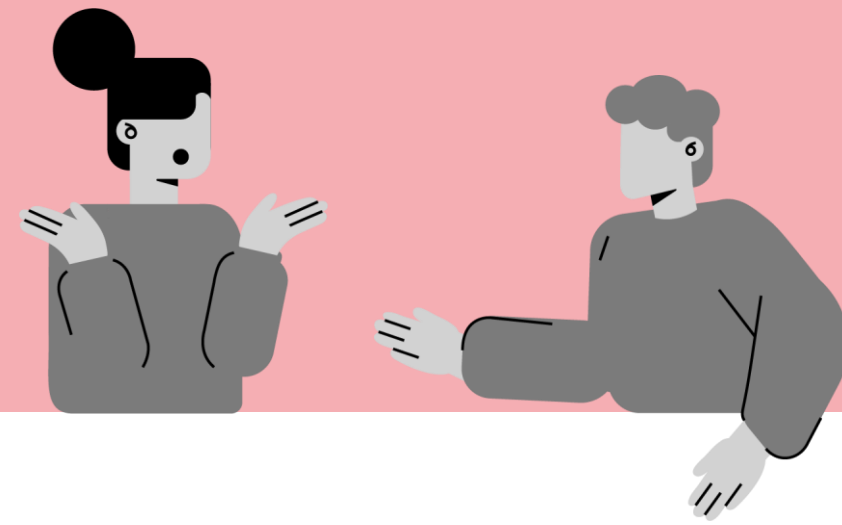


“

When that is not there, you're trying to figure out, 'What do I do? Where do I go?'"

**Broadband, Urban, England**

# The emotional impact of outages:



## Confusion

*"I think there was obviously a bit of confusion at the start, not knowing what was going on. And then also, [we were given] the time-frame, and then that time-frame went up, there was confusion"* Mobile and Broadband, Urban, Scotland



## Frustration and anger

*"With [respondent's brother, name redacted] having learning disabilities, he can get quite angry at times, or quite stressed if things aren't how he wants them, when he wants them."* Broadband, Rural, England



## Stress and anxiety

*"Yes. I mean, it was quite frustrating for both me and my mum because I guess it's in that moment that you realise how reliant you are on the internet and the Wi-Fi network... it was quite stressful..."* Broadband, Urban, England



## Isolated and helplessness

*"But being a female living on my own, losing my phone, and if the internet's gone, so I can't then use WhatsApp or like Facebook Messenger or anything like that is quite intimidating because quite like to get hold of my dad."* Mobile, Urban, England

## The impact of outages on individuals with caring responsibilities and disabilities and health conditions:

For individuals with caring responsibilities and disabilities, outages pose additional challenges and often heightened emotions too.

In the research we had several participants who had caring responsibilities for children with learning disabilities. In these cases, often entertainment services like YouTube, streaming services and gaming are an important part of how they care and entertain for them. They often provide them with the ability to complete other day to day tasks too. When access to these services is lost often care providers found those with learning disabilities found it difficult to understand and adapt to the outage. They also found it difficult to manage emotions in these moments too.

Individuals with disabilities who took part also raised particular concerns regarding the impact of not being able to contact people should they need to, creating a particularly stressful experience.



"He was angry, yes. He was angry, because he doesn't deal with emotions, yes, he was angry..."

**Participant with caring responsibilities for her son with learning difficulties (Broadband, Rural, England)**

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"I felt really quite vulnerable... even with my condition where I'm quite immobilised... When your line of communication is completely diminished, it was scary. The fear of me having an episode and the potential of possibly being completely helpless..."

**Participant with a neurological disorder (Mobile, Broadband and Landline, Remote, Wales)**



## For those who WFH and micro business owners a loss of internet access is particularly frustrating

Where people rely on their internet connection to work from home or for microbusinesses who rely on their internet in the office, an outage of their broadband outage is particularly impactful.

Whilst for short outages of under an hour this is mainly inconvenient and frustrating, it can **have an impact on their livelihoods**. Longer outages are particularly impactful for this group.

In many instances, without their broadband connection the work they can do by either working offline or by using **alternatives like mobile data is often limited and significantly slower**. As such these do not adequately cover the impact of the loss of their broadband connection.

It is for this group as well where **the timing of the outage is particularly important for how much of an impact it has**, outside of work hours outages are far less impactful and for most cases only impact their recreation usage of their services.

*"It was essential, and I had to actually get somebody else to fulfill what I was doing at that time to ensure I got that sale."* **Microbusiness owner, Mobile and Broadband, Remote, England**



# Broadband was the most important service for consumers

## **Broadband**

This was the most commonly relied upon service by consumers. Many work, recreational and day to day tasks relied on their access to this service at home. Outages were likely to cause the most disruption to people.

## **Mobile services**

Second most disruptive to consumers was a mobile outage. The impact of a mobile outage could be negated for many consumers whilst they were at home or able to connect to broadband due to services like WhatsApp.

## **Landline and Pay-TV**

Least likely to be impactful for consumers were landline and Pay-TV outages. Few respondents of any demographics relied upon them over mobile or broadband to either stay connected or for recreational use.



# What caused the outage was also a key driver of consumers experiences

## **Weather**

Those who experienced a storm generally more satisfied with their experiences during outages. They appreciated that the circumstances were outside of their providers control. But they also often had more patience for their providers to resolve the issue too as the outages were so widespread.

## **Power**

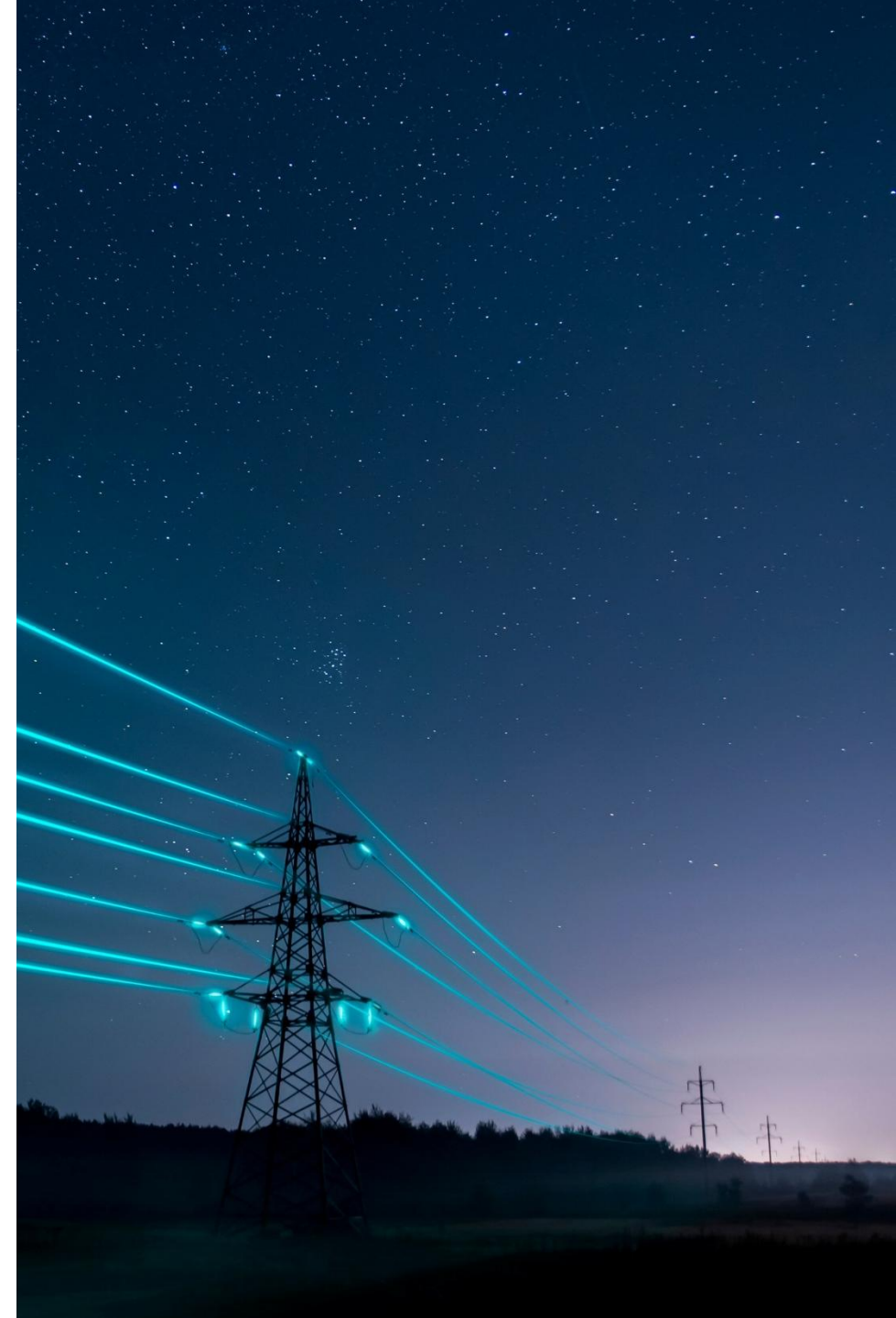
Power cuts were similar to weather for their impact on consumers with the additional impact for their access to heat and power.

## **Technical issues**

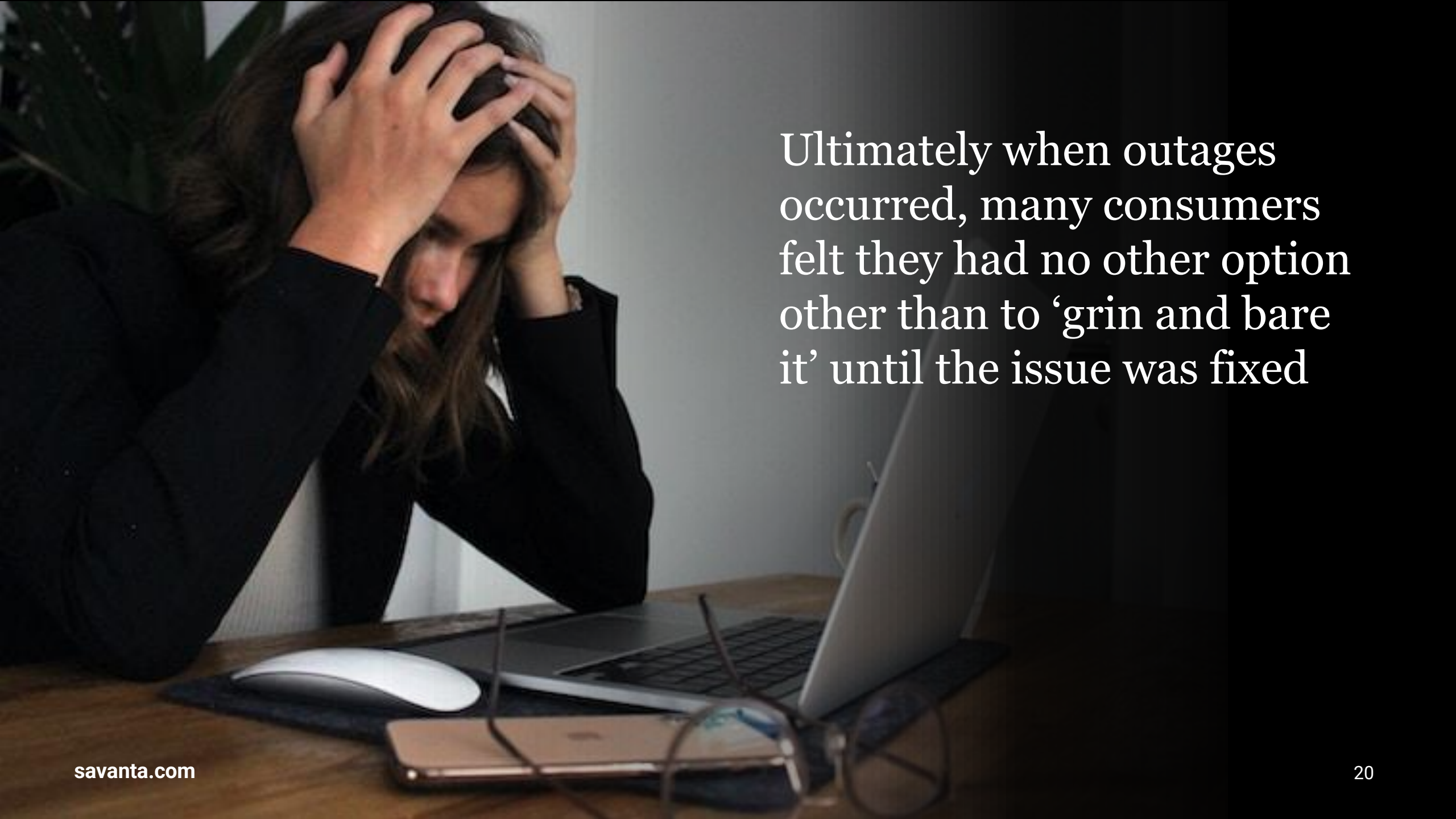
Although consumers appreciate that technical issues can arise with services. Outages caused by technical issues were frustrating for consumers. Often this was due to the lack of details regarding what the specific nature of the issue was.

## **Provider errors**

Consumers were most disgruntled by outages caused by errors from providers and their contractors. They were felt to be the most avoidable type of outage.







Ultimately when outages occurred, many consumers felt they had no other option other than to 'grin and bare it' until the issue was fixed

# How consumers handle network outages

In terms of immediate responses to the outages, this typically followed a similar pattern, relying on temporary solutions and support from those around them

### Restarting devices and basic troubleshooting

The first course of action for most respondents was to troubleshoot by restarting their routers, modems, or other related devices. This included basic steps like checking cables and ensuring all connections were secure.

“

*We tried the usual things like switching off the router and putting it back on.”*

Urban participant with broadband outages, England

### Using mobile data and hotspots

Many respondents quickly switched to using mobile data or set up personal hotspots from their phones to maintain internet access for essential tasks and communication.

Sometimes they used neighbours' wifi if there was no option for this.

“

*I ended up having to find a different way around it by using my phone as a hotspot.”*

Urban participant with broadband outages, England

### Moving to locations with Wi-Fi

Some respondents sought out locations with reliable Wi-Fi, such as friends' or relatives' homes, or public places like libraries and cafés. This solution was especially helpful for those needing to perform work tasks or important communications.

“

*I did text my friend who lives on the other side of the village and she's on a different Wi-Fi. So, I then went to go work with her for a couple of days.”*

Rural participant with broadband outages, Wales

### Checking network status and community updates

Respondents often checked their provider's website, community forums, or social media for updates on network status and outage reports, helping them understand if the issue was widespread and when it might be resolved. This was primarily for reassurance.

“

*It comes up on my [local] Facebook page straight away near enough about the outage ... They're good sites, they do give you a lot information.”*

Rural participant with broadband outages, Scotland

## More long-term plans included working with alternatives and backups, though this often involved some preplanning that consumers didn't often do

When facing an outage, other than the initial reactions, respondents tended to 'wait it out' and work around the outage, using alternative ways to connect including mobile data, Wi-Fi, or a landline, depending on the type of outage.

**Other alternatives were rarely used** but included backup internet sources such as portable Wi-Fi routers that can be topped up with data, increasing mobile data plans, or using provider-supplied replacements. These **alternatives were not considered like-for-like replacements due to factors such as cost and speed**. Some respondents chose to continue using mobile data due to uncertainty about the outage duration and lack of advance notice.

In cases of power outages or storms, some respondents used generators or kits full of torches, primarily focused on maintaining power rather than Wi-Fi. They saw a power outage as inevitably resulting in a loss of internet connection.

Respondents also prepared local backups by downloading important work and entertainment content in advance and using traditional telephones and other emergency equipment. However, these workarounds were feasible mostly with notice, and unplanned outages left many unprepared. **Most acknowledged the need for better pre-planning but had not made significant strides in that area.**



[You just] plug it in, connect your devices to it, it's not run by fibre optic cabling, so **the speed and the capability of it wasn't the same**. So, we had to manage how we did things. The children would get an hour each on it at night and then it would be adult time later in the evening if we wanted to watch some TV. So, then you're more reliant on your mobile data. If you wanted to look through things on your phone ... you transfer it all to your mobile data, which then eats through your mobile data. You're wary of what you're using and what you're watching, and if you're watching a lot of videos, it burns through your data even quicker."

**Remote participant sent a plug-in Wi-Fi box through the post, both broadband and mobile outages, England**

## Aside from contacting their provider, respondents drew on support from their local community, either online or in person



### **Neighbours, friends and family members**

This included using their Wi-Fi networks to find out what was happening with their service providers or even for friends, staying at their homes to continue their work and daily routines.

Aside from minimizing disruptions, support included inviting friends to move into their homes to ensure they had a safe and comfortable place to stay.



### **Social media or local news sources**

Respondents looked to local/neighbourhood Facebook pages, X or Google for reassurance and information.

They used this as a form of gaining status updates, and word-of-mouth information on resolution timelines. In some instances, this helped respondents prepare and put backup plans in place in advance.



### **Employers**

In cases where working from home was interrupted, some respondents received support from their employers, allowing them to use office infrastructure.

One respondent due to conduct online training at home needed to make a 2 hour round trip into work in order to undertake the task there instead.



### **Public places**

Respondents frequented public places such as libraries, cafés, and supermarkets that offered free or paid Wi-Fi to stay connected during outages.

These locations provided a temporary solution for accessing the internet.



# Provider communications with consumers regarding outages

# Consumers' experience with their providers differed depending on whether the outage was planned or unplanned

For planned outages, consumers typically expect and received **advance notifications** allowing them to **prepare** accordingly. In contrast, unplanned outages often **catch consumers off guard**, leading to higher levels of **frustration and disruption** due to insufficient information and support.

## Planned outage

Consumers generally received **advance notifications** that included **detailed information** about the timing, duration, and reason for the outage.

While some consumers found the notice periods sufficient, others felt that the information came **too late to make necessary arrangements**.

“

[I was informed] maybe the Friday before. That should have been at least a week or 2 beforehand.”

Urban household, lost connection with broadband and mobile, Scotland

## Unplanned outage

Unplanned outages, by their nature, do not provide any opportunity for advance notice, however communication during and after the outage was **inconsistent**.

Consumers reported **a lack of real-time updates** and **uncertainty about resolution timelines** which led to significant **frustration**.

“

Nothing at all, other than me reaching to them to find out what was going on.”

Rural household, lost connection with broadband, Wales

## Provider response and communication - unplanned

The response from network providers during unplanned outages was **varied and inconsistent**.

Younger consumers, with a better understanding of technology, were more likely to **check on their provider's website for information**. For some consumers, this was enough to understand their outage.

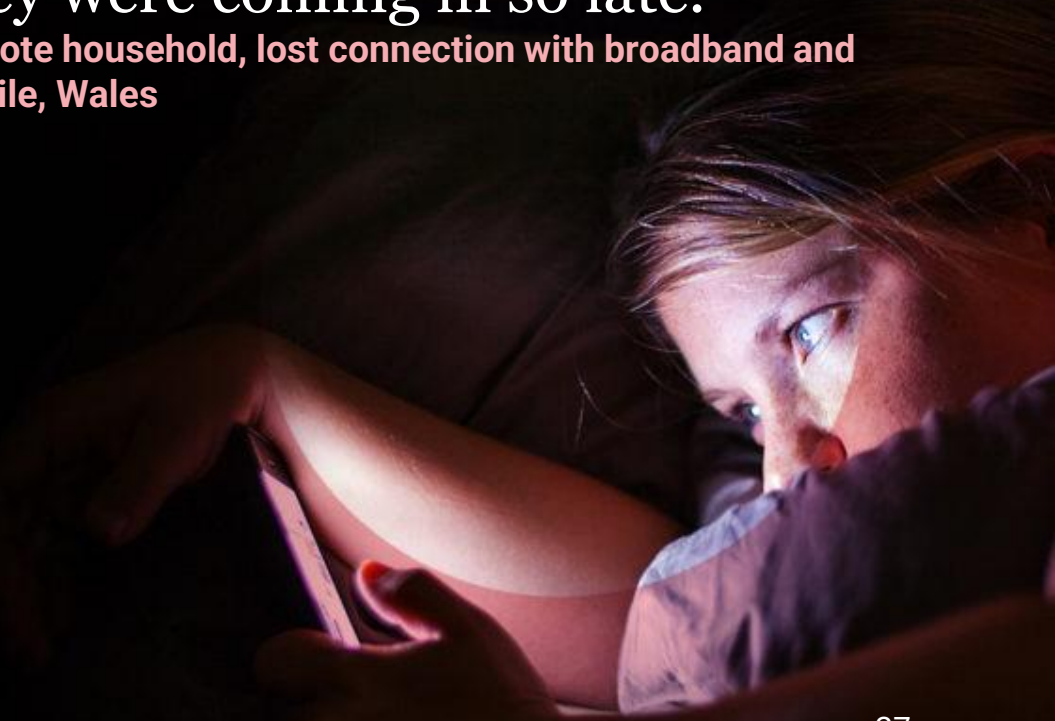
However, for others, they were left **without receiving proactive communication** from their provider. They often had to **initiate contact** with their provider to understand the problem or had to **'wait out' the outage** until it was resolved.

Many consumers were **frustrated by the absence of clear timelines** for service restoration, which led to additional impacts on consumers.

“

The message we got a day late. The updates didn't match our reality. They weren't accurate, because they were coming in so late.

Remote household, lost connection with broadband and mobile, Wales



# Without timely or accurate updates, consumers were unable to make informed decisions resulting in additional impacts

The lack of clarity and frequency in communication was reported across consumer groups, with repeated complaints about **non-specific and repetitive messages**. These vague communications often left consumers **struggling to navigate around service outages**, resulting in missed appointments and events. For instance, one consumer had to travel to work (a one-hour commute each way) to ensure they did not miss important training. Unfortunately, the internet service resumed shortly after their departure, highlighting how more accurate and timely updates on estimated resolution times **could have led to better-informed decisions**.

The absence of timely or accurate updates left consumers without the necessary information to effectively manage around the outages. Some consumers faced **financial implications**, such as exhausting their mobile data, due to the lack of estimated resolution updates.



I don't just want to know that there's an outage because that's clear to me already. I'd like to know at least what's wrong or is it going to be fixed today? Is it not? Is it going to be a couple of hours? Is it just going to be a few minutes? Just so you can plan ahead."

**Rural household, lost connection with broadband, England**

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If you're made aware, you can make some other plans, do something else...when you don't know, you are just reliant on something, and then it's taken away from you."

**Urban household, lost connection with broadband, England**

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There were no details of what was going on... it was the same thing said over and over again."

**Micro business owner, lost connection with mobile, Scotland**

# Consumers have specific preferences and expectations for communication during a network outage

## Preferred modes of communication

Consumers unanimously preferred receiving updates **via text messages and emails** due to their immediacy and convenience.

Texts and emails provided **quick and direct** communication, which reassured consumers during disruptions. These modes were **familiar and accessible**, ensuring that they received necessary information promptly.

However, it was noted that if their mobile service was down, text messages would not be received therefore having **multiple avenues for contacting consumers** was seen as necessary.

“

I would say text message. I've always put down, 'Updates by text' because I think the text is more reliable than any of the other sources.”

Urban household, lost connection with broadband, Scotland

## Desire for detailed information

Many found the communication they received **vague and lacking in specific details**, which hindered their ability to make informed decisions.

Detailed information was crucial for consumers, especially business owners, who needed to **manage client expectations** and provide details in case of missed deadlines or orders.

The lack of detailed information was also important for consumers who work from home. Without this information, they were **left unable to make suitable arrangements** or workarounds.

“

A dedicated somebody who deals with businesses, who can actually give me the precise information, i.e. 'This is what's happened. This is why it's happened. This is when it's going to be fixed.' I didn't get any timelines whatsoever. I think they should prioritise the people who use [their service] as a business.”

Micro business owner, lost connection with broadband, England

# Providing timely updates and using simple explanations can significantly enhance consumers' outage experience

## Preferred modes of communication

Delayed communication and updates arriving too late were common complaints that significantly increased frustration and confusion around the outage.

The lack of timely updates compounded consumers' stress as they **tried to manage work responsibilities without clear information**. Particularly for rural residents, their inability to understand when outages would be resolved caused significant impacts on their day by having to **travel elsewhere or further into the office** to be able to continue with the tasks they needed to do.

Regular updates, even if no new information is available, **reassures consumers that the issue is being actively addressed**.

“

Just keeping regular updates and a rough idea of when they expect it to be fixed, because I don't know how long they normally last for. It would be useful to know, 'This is going to impact you until 7:00pm tomorrow.' Then I know to go into the office tomorrow and not work from home.”

Urban household, lost connection with broadband, England

## Desire for detailed information

Some consumers felt additional stress by the use of **technical jargon and unclear explanations** in communication from their providers. Consumers expressed a need for simple, straightforward language that they could easily understand.

For example, explanations of 'server failures' were unclear to some consumers who were looking for more information. On the other hand, when providers were **clear and reassuring**, this was praised by consumers as it **helped them feel informed**.

Additionally, when consumers contacted their provider for support, often these calls were **unclear**, required **complicated steps** to resolve their issue or were **repetitive** which often led to increased frustration for consumers.

“

I think with any provider, and this is whether it's broadband, whether this is mobiles, there are people who are less technical than other people, and I think the avoidance of terminology is essential.”

Micro business owner, lost connection with broadband, England

# Consumer recommendations

## Consumers emphasise the necessity for *advance notice and transparency* in communication from service providers

Effective and timely updates about both planned and unplanned outages are crucial to help consumers **prepare and adapt their daily routines**.

This was suggested to include proactive contact as well as detailed information about the outage, such as the cause, and areas affected, and set out estimated resolution times, giving as much notice as possible to allow respondents to plan.

In terms of preferred methods, this could include text messages, emails, and app notifications to deliver real-time information on the status and expected resolution of outages. There were suggestions for a multi-channel approach to reach all affected users.

This clear and proactive communication reduces uncertainty and frustration, allowing consumers to plan accordingly, as well as manage their expectations for a resolution.

However, participants acknowledged that in some instances, the provider may not even know of an outage occurring, particularly if it is limited to just their broadband, or if they are in a storm.



If we had been warned, we would have sat the night before and just downloaded a bunch of stuff on it and *everything would have been a lot calmer than what it was*, but because we didn't know and because we trusted that because nothing has come out, we'll just risk it and leave it ... it could have been a lot less stressful in the beginning.”

**Remote participant with caring responsibilities for child with autism, England**



## Consumers also suggested *compensation becomes more common practice*, as they are paying for a service not received

Consumers expect service providers to ensure **high reliability and minimal outage occurrences**. Prompt action should be taken to restore services in the event of an outage.

Providing compensation for prolonged outages was felt as a recognition for the loss of a service they are paying for, and the inconvenience associated with not having the service. Compensation could be in the form of bill credits, reduced charges, or vouchers.

This was primarily perceived as appropriate for significant outages where consumers are left without services for significant periods, particularly over 24 hours.

Respondents who received compensation often had to proactively contact their service provider to obtain it. For those who successfully received it, the experience was positive and straightforward, providing a sense of acknowledgement for the issues they faced. However, the compensation sometimes felt insufficient; a small contribution may occasionally seem inadequate and can even exacerbate dissatisfaction.

“

I mean, you would expect a definite guarantee, wouldn't you? Because, obviously, you're paying for a service.”

**Rural respondent with broadband outages, Wales**

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Neither of them offered any compensation, not even spoke to us about compensation or asked if our daily lives were interrupted.”

**Urban respondent with broadband outages, England**

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I felt like [one provider], they were trying to come with the lowest offer, and it was a bit insulting, really, considering how much money they get off me each month.”

**Remote respondent with mobile and broadband outages, England**

## Providers should invest in *robust networks and infrastructure* to reduce the likelihood of service disruptions

A common consumer recommendation is for service providers to make continuous improvements to their infrastructure to prevent outages, especially in rural or high-risk areas prone to weather-related disruptions. This includes regular maintenance and upgrades to existing network components, as well as the implementation of robust emergency systems to minimise disruption.

This was particularly true for those who are in rural areas, with a suggested focus on improving connectivity in rural/remote areas where services can be more unreliable.

In addition to this, the very low knowledge of alternatives emphasised this, where respondents felt they had to deal with the situation on their own. Comprehensive support and offering packages or suggestions with easy-to-activate backup services were universally appreciated.



They could build some more mast towers in the area. They could communicate better with the actual builders, like, the council and stuff, about any upcoming sites being built, stuff like that. Maybe any weather-related things that are going to affect service levels and all that.”

**Rural respondent with mobile and broadband outages, England**

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Obviously, there are going to be outages, but I think, in rural areas now, we shouldn't be so behind, it's not fair.

**Rural respondent with mobile and broadband outages, Wales**

## Consumers found that they had a significant challenge connecting to their providers, and *speaking to someone who could help*

Consumers often experience challenges reaching knowledgeable and responsive customer service representatives during outages.

It's recommended that service providers streamline their customer support processes to connect customers quickly with the right agents who are empowered to assist, avoiding feeling bounced around or stuck with unhelpful chatbots.

Aside from a lack of proactive communication, when they do reach out, consumers report minimal support, lack of reassurance, and unempathetic responses, making it difficult to resolve issues

Efficiently routing calls, providing clear updates, and having a transparent system for tracking complaints can significantly improve customer satisfaction during network outages.

Additionally, finding a support number can be particularly difficult for people in vulnerable circumstances.



When I'd left the house to then phone [their provider] because it wasn't going back on, the guy on the phone was really rude."

**Rural participant with broadband outages, Wales**

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It was totally frustrating because it was just a waste of my time calling, really. Because, to say they didn't know it was going to be fixed, well, I could tell them that and I'm not doing the work. The person on the end of the phone was very polite, very helpful but, obviously, restricted in what the information they could glean."

**Remote microbusiness with broadband outages, England**

## In some instances, *prioritising specific households with additional needs* could be critical during an outage

In instances where consumers have more complex needs, service providers are urged to **recognise and cater to the specific needs of different households**. Especially households with people in vulnerable circumstances such as children with disabilities, elderly members, or people with critical medical needs. This would be similar to the Priority Services Register (PSR) seen by other utility providers.

Tailoring communication and support to these households can help **mitigate the impact of outages and ensure they receive prioritised attention and solutions**. Providers should consider offering specialised support plans and resources to assist these households during network outages.

There was also a suggestion of a similar priority by one microbusiness, where they had missed out on orders and suffered financially due to the outages. This could take the form of separate helplines or specific website support pages.

“

If I think about friends who have got children who are non-verbal but communicate via pics on their iPad, they now have got no voice between them and their parents. So, that's quite sad. Yes, just, like, when you do call up and you're trying to explain your frustration and you're, kind of, just dismissed. I suppose that's my only gripe with having a child with a disability that companies may not really see.”

**Rural respondent with caring responsibilities for child with ADHD and autism, power and broadband outage, England**

# Case studies of consumers during outages

# Rural household - Wales

This consumer is a medically-retired serviceman living in an isolated rural part of Wales. He lives with his partner who is a Civil Servant who often works from home.

**Outage:** Frequently lost connection to broadband, mobile, and landline

“

I felt really quite vulnerable, and I'm not someone who normally feels vulnerable, even with my condition where I'm quite immobilised and I'm in a lot of pain. There's always a solution. When your line of communication is completely diminished, it was scary.”

Rural household, lost connection with broadband, mobile & landline

## Impact on the consumer

The consumer experienced significant disruptions to daily activities that relied on communication services. Essential services like mobile banking were inaccessible, creating significant inconvenience.

The consumer who lives with a physical condition, **felt particularly vulnerable during outages**. The inability to contact emergency services or his partner if needed exacerbated his sense of vulnerability. This was further impacted by his partner needing to go into the office due to being **unable to work from home** during outages, taking their shared vehicle, **leaving the consumer even less likely to get help if needed**.

## Response to the outage

The consumer attempted to communicate with their provider, through mobile phone calls. This effort itself was **fraught with challenges, due to having to move locations with better signal**.

The consumer experienced numerous **frustrating interactions** with their provider's customer service, including denied compensation, deleted call logs, and rude responses. The **poor customer service exacerbated the stress** of the outages and led the consumer to switch providers.



[The network provider's] customer service was shocking...it was clear that they had no customer service training whatsoever. They were really quite antagonistic and hostile, which is the opposite to what good customer service is.

### **Rural household - Wales**

Frequent mobile and broadband outages with the same provider

### **Lessons learned**

The consumer feels that network providers should send timely and accurate notifications about service disruptions and estimated resolution times.

Additionally, the communications providers should be trained in handling issues professionally and empathetically. This will help customers feel supported during their outage which in turn will improve satisfaction with how the outage is dealt with and resolved.

# Urban household - England

This consumer lives in Bideford, North Devon and is studying alongside being a social care worker. They identify as female, they live alone, and they live away from family due to recently moving to the location.

**Outage:** Broadband, reason unknown

“

Being a female, living on my own, losing my phone, if the internet's gone so I can't then use WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger or anything like that, its quite intimidating.”

Urban household, lost connection with broadband

## Impact on the consumer

The outage affected the consumer's university studies and left her feeling 'cut-off' from not being able to communicate with family members

The interruption impacted her university studies, causing her **to worry about potential setbacks**, especially with crucial deadlines.

Living alone in a new town with limited local contacts, **the internet outage left her feeling isolated.**

## Response to the outage

The consumer attempted to check and fix her devices wondering if the issue was device-specific. She ended up going to bed, **hoping the outage would be resolved by morning** which it was.

The consumer experienced **no communication or notification from her network provider**, during or after the outage. She expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of acknowledgment or updates from the provider, suggesting, "a letter to the houses that were affected would have been nice."



“

I think them making contact...afterwards to send a letter just to say, 'This is what the problem was. This is what we've done,' just so there's some reassurance that it won't happen again.

**Urban household - England**

Broadband outage, reason unknown

## **Lessons learned**

Given the dependency on network services, she has started backing up her university work and making pre-arrangements for alternative communication methods with family, like text messaging in case another outage occurs.

The consumer emphasised the critical need for timely and reliable communication from her network provider during outages to allow customers to plan better and reduce anxiety. She mentioned, after the outage, a letter explaining the cause, resolution, and steps taken to prevent recurrence would provide reassurance. She suggested that information about who to contact in case of an outage should be included in post-outage communication.

# Family with specific needs - England

This consumer is a support worker who lives in Guilford with her 16-year-old son who is diagnosed with ADHD and autism.

**Outage:** Power failure during a weekend causing a loss of connection of internet and mobile services for 4 hours.

“

I was struggling to regulate his emotions. He was struggling to maintain routine and deal with his outbursts and I suppose communicate effectively.”

Family with specific needs, lost connection with broadband and mobile

## Impact on the consumer

The consumer found the outage irritating and frustrating, as it disrupted her routine and **caused additional stress managing her son's needs.**

The consumer's son became **very angry, disappointed, and confused.** He relies heavily on his iPad for communication and routine. The consumer **struggled to maintain calm and focus for her son,** diverting all her attention to keeping her son safe.

## Response to the outage

The consumer managed to extend connectivity for some time using mobile data but eventually **faced limitations as device batteries depleted.**

The consumer received text updates from her electricity and mobile service providers. However, there was **a lack of detailed and timely updates** which contributed to her frustration.



I think you just feel that companies mainly see disabilities as physical. So, actually, the urgency to solve certain problems may not be as imperative as even thinking about someone with a communication aide on their iPad that has now died, and they've got no way of communicating.

### **Family with specific needs- England**

Power failure causing a loss of connection of internet and mobile services for 4 hours

## **Lessons learned**

The consumer learned about the Priority Services Register for consumers in vulnerable situations during the outage as something she could apply to be put on. She believes network providers should proactively identify and communicate with households with vulnerable individuals to offer tailored support during outages. This support should be for those with 'hidden' disabilities as well.

The consumer understands that outages can occur, but they feel communication could be more empathetic and understanding of customers' needs.

# Micro business owner - Wales

This consumer runs a small family lettings and estate agency in a small town in Wales. As a business, they're very dependent on both mobile and broadband networks to operate both in the office and surrounding area.

**Outage:** Mobile outage lasting 2-3 weeks due to broken pylon. Previous outage of broadband a couple of years ago.

“

We couldn't do any payments, no banking was done. So, landlords didn't get paid for 3 days in total by the time it was all back up and running.”

Micro business owner, lost connection with mobile

## Impact on the consumer

The consumer faced **inflexibility in their business operations** as they rely on real-time updates and communication for property viewing scheduling. Without a mobile network, updating appointments, sending directions, or providing immediate customer service was **impossible**.

The network issues potentially **led to losing clients who faced delayed or missed appointments**. When facing the broadband outage **immediate financial transactions, such as rental payments, were affected**, causing significant delays. Due to these impacts on the business, the consumer **felt stressed and experienced significant frustration** with trying to resolve the outages.

## Response to the outage

With the broadband outage, the business initially utilised an internet connection provided by a tenant living in the building through an ISDN line. The consumer argued that this 'got us out of jail' as **any further delays in accessing WiFi would have caused significant problems with payment delays**.

In terms of the mobile network outage, the consumer made efforts to get updates and solutions from their provider, but this resulted in **inaccurate resolution times and unhelpful responses**.

“

[I felt] frustrated. Definitely frustrated, because, you know, it's not exactly cheap, the money you pay to [their provider] every month and we expect some reliability. You don't appreciate it until it's gone, you don't appreciate how important it is to you.

**Microbusiness owner - Wales**

Mobile outage of 2-3 weeks network due to broken pylon

## Lessons learned

The respondent concluded that network providers should be more open about the causes and expected durations of outages. Regular updates and check-ins would have greatly improved the consumer's experience rather than the onus being on the consumer to seek out updates.

The consumer felt that providers should offer alternative temporary solutions such as network sharing with other mobile providers to avoid prolonged outages. The consumer argued that with the amount of money being paid for their business mobile plan, there needs to be a guarantee that the network can be relied upon.

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