

PULSAR*



Energy prices: a new era in the
energy consumer
conversation

The new landscape for the energy consumer

For decades, in many countries, energy has been something the public has almost entirely taken for granted: energy was for the most part relatively cheap, and while some were aware of the harm to the environment, that was rarely a primary concern. Now we're entering a new era of consumer behavior, awareness, and choice relating to energy

This new era has ushered in greater awareness of where energy comes from, of what actions the consumer can take on their side, and of the perils that result from nations and communities simply not having enough to live

The insights within this report were generated using Pulsar TRAC, which enabled us to analyze over 1.7 million individual data points drawn from:



Twitter



Reddit



Sermo



Pinterest



Tumblr



YouTube



VK



Naver



Amazon Reviews



News



Blogs



Forums

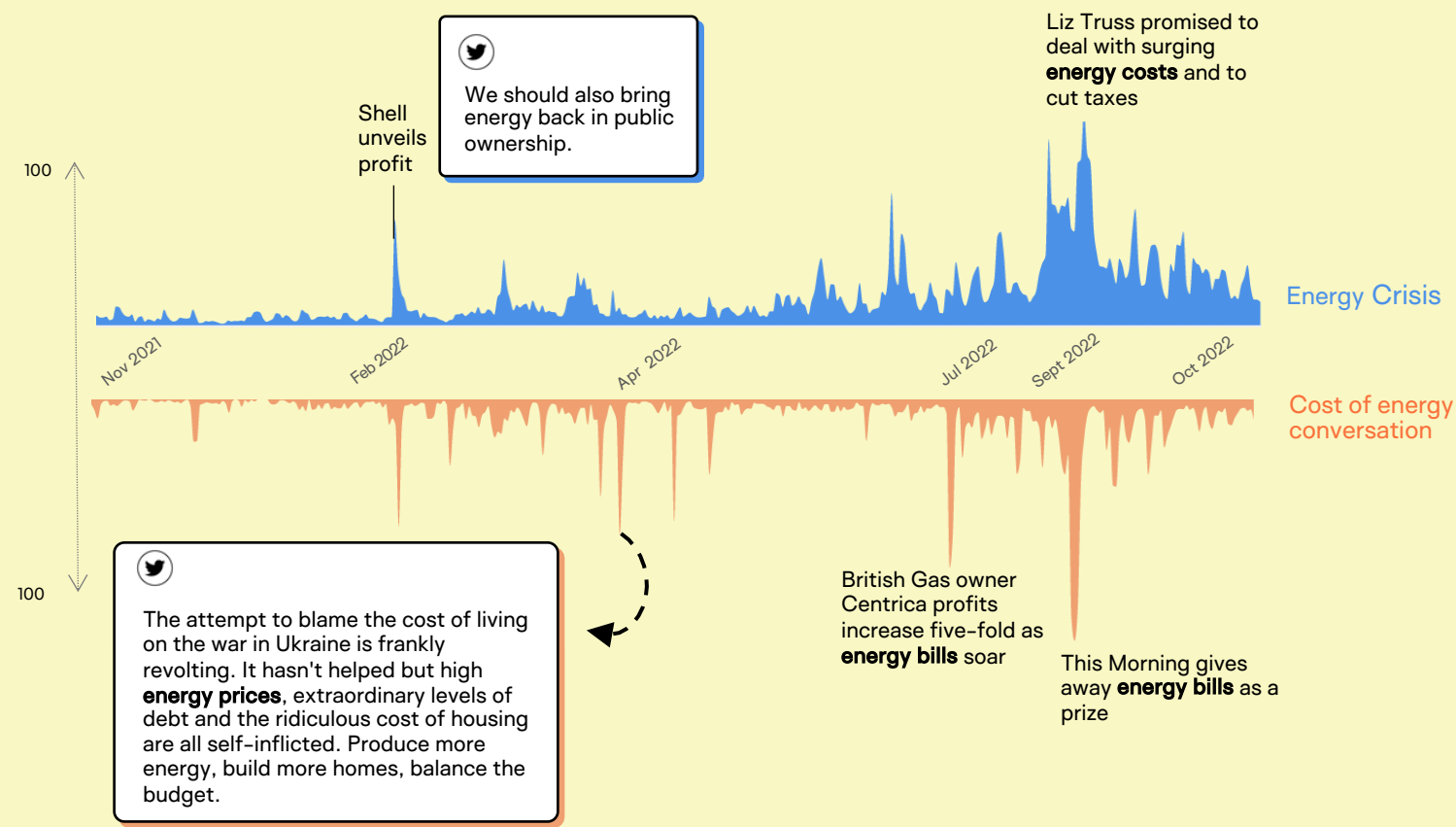
How do mentions of an 'energy crisis' mirror real consumer conversations?

Overt mentions of an 'energy crisis' are useful, but they can be misleading. Political conversations create a distinction between abstract or future-looking usage and reports of real-time issues.

By charting occurrences of the phrase against the organic discussions of energy bills and expenses, we see that the latter conversation took longer to start, as decisions made on the geopolitical realm took several months to come into effect.

This consumer conversation has appeared to take off in earnest as summer ends – again because the real-world implications suddenly became stark.

Consumer conversation also appears streaky, and prone to individual spikes in interest. One potential reason for this is that individuals are less likely to share personal and potentially embarrassing stories of struggle on public, rather than private forums – but will amplify personal posts they feel reflect their own experience.



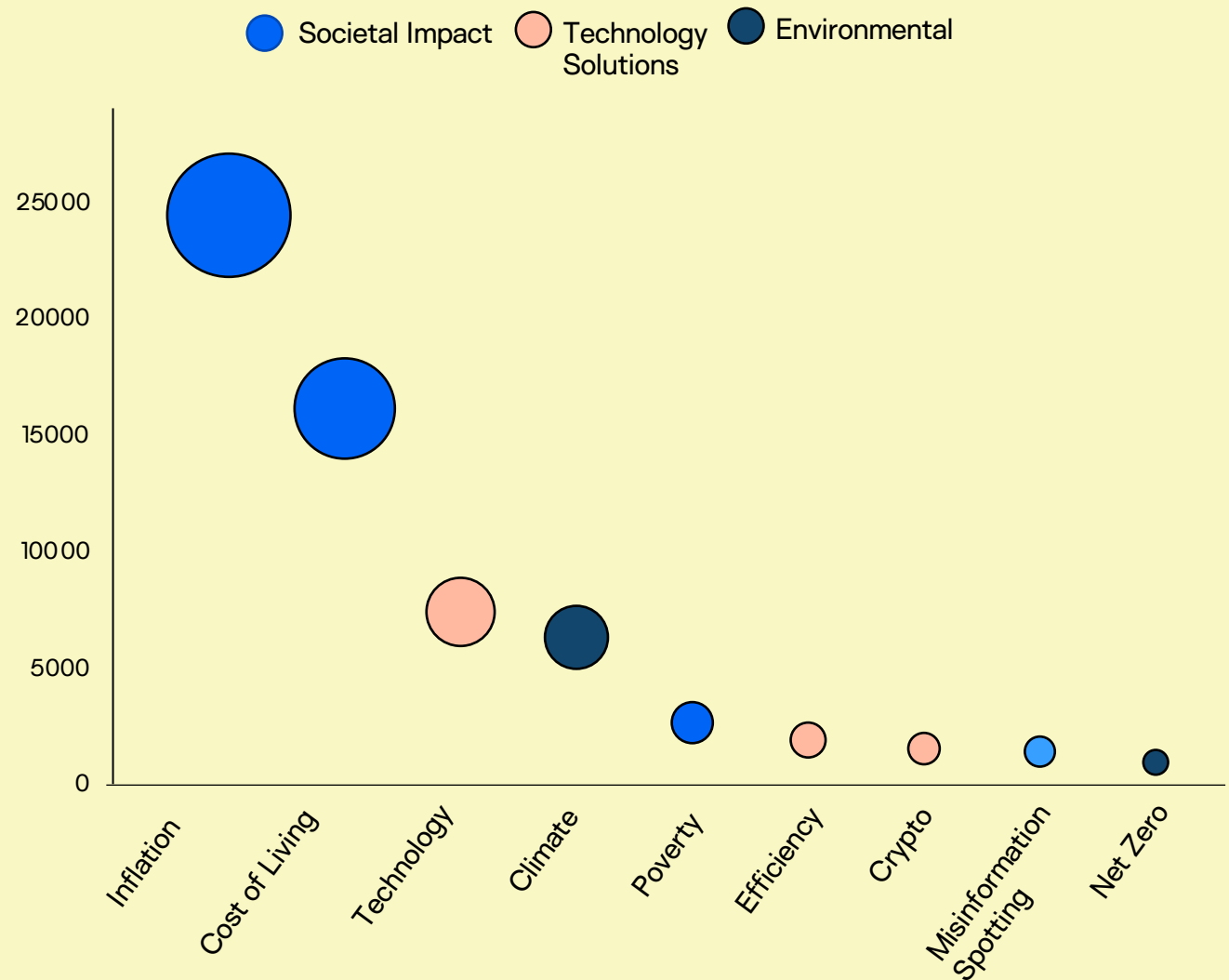
What topics are driving the conversation around personal energy costs?

Having established the distinction between the political 'energy crisis' conversation, and the experiences of consumers playing out in real-time, we chose to focus our attentions on the latter.

To gain a bird's eye view of the topics driving conversation in this sphere, we looked for mentions of a variety of topics, spanning societal impact, technological solutions and the environmental.

This immediately suggests that the conversation is very much focused on the problems caused by the crisis – but also that there are emergent discussions touching on potential solutions. The fact that climate is discussed more than poverty suggests that the very real economic strictures society is undergoing has not caused the wider populace to shy away from sustainability.

Inflation, though, remains a predominant concern, while we also see a strong thread of people labelling themselves unwilling participants in the 'cost of living' crisis. Adopting a bottom-up approach, however, will allow us to explore the topic in more minute, and insightful, detail.



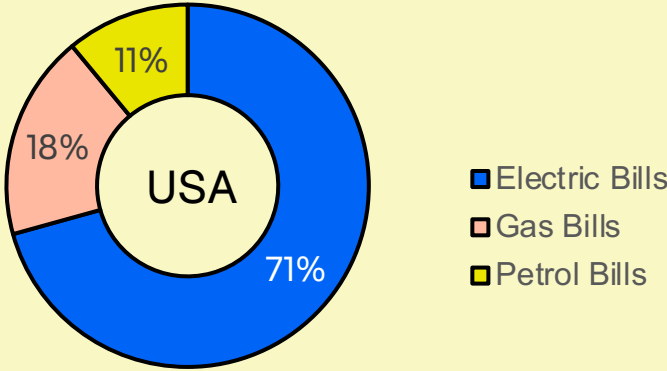
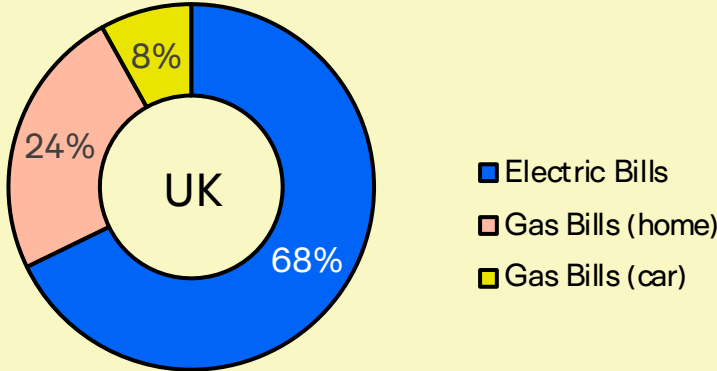
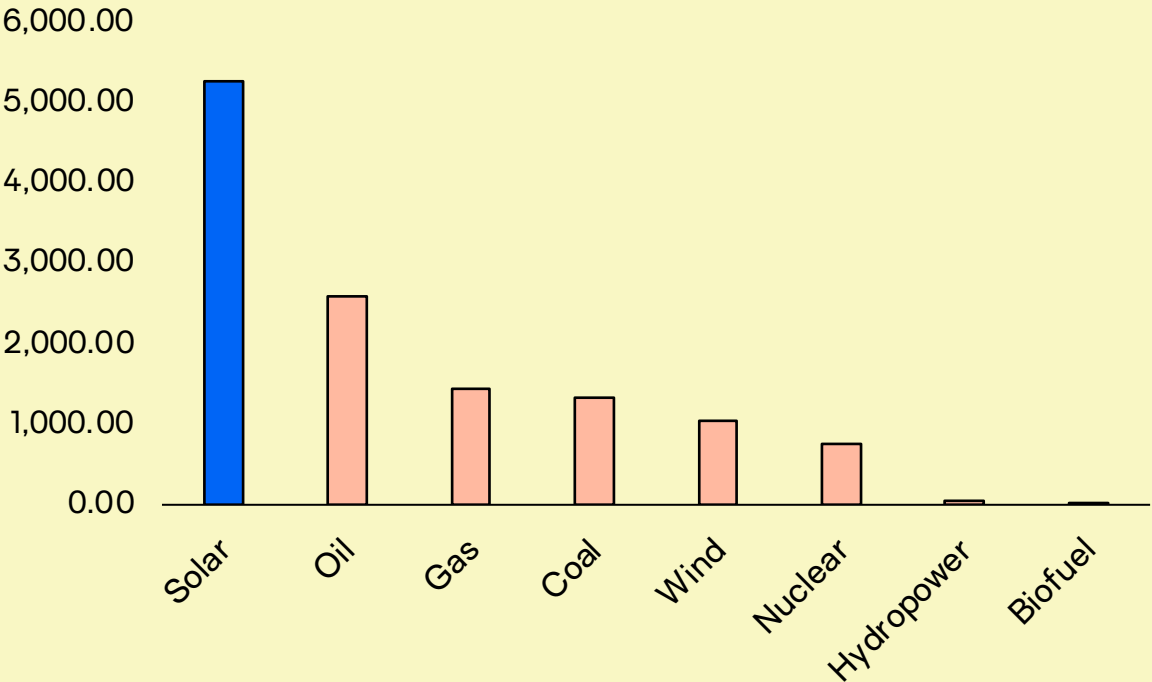
How does the public talk about different energy sources?

Consumers talk about how their energy is generated – and what their bills are divided between.

In the first instance, solar is over-represented on the supply side. Why? It's a very politicised topic – for every individual citing it as a green solution,

there are a number of conservative individuals lambasting that solar's popularity has not alleviated the wider economic situation.

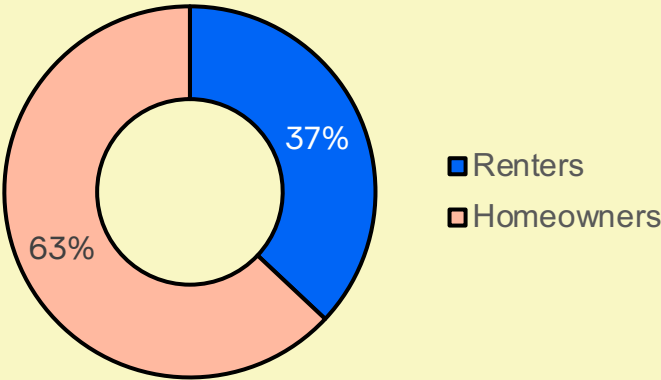
Regarding bills, on the other hand, we see the UK and US's respective focus on a dwindling European gas supply, and the cultural import of the car, reflected in the divergence between vehicular and home heating mentions.



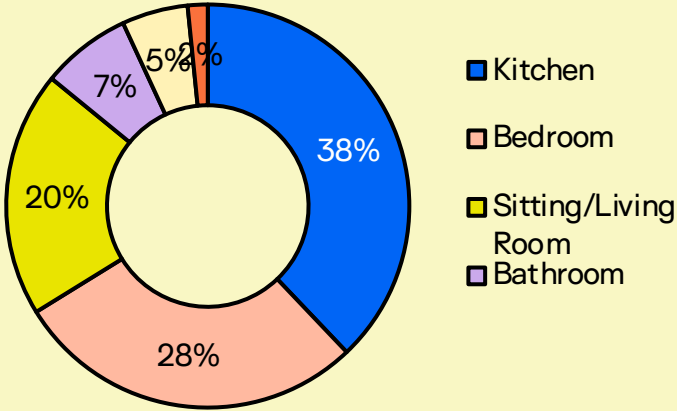
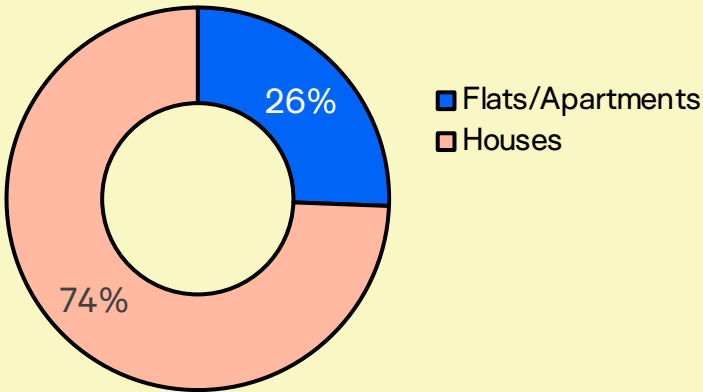
Top-mentioned energy sources associated with bills (left) and mentions of different bill types in the US and UK conversation (right) on Twitter, Reddit, Blogs, Forums, Reviews and more. Jun 1 2022 – Nov 16 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

Where do people talking about energy cost struggles live?

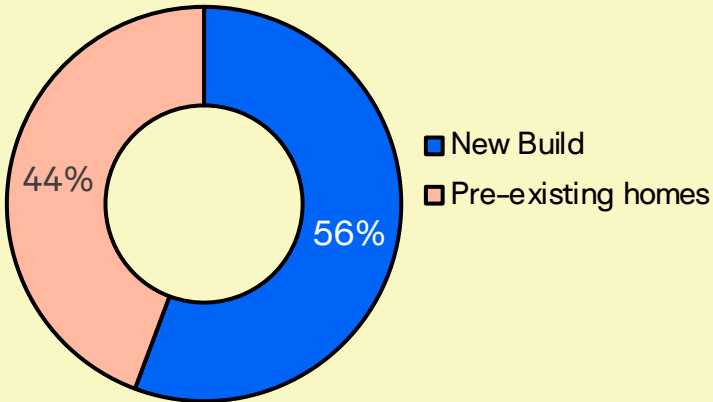
Do they own their property?
Renters under-represented in UK, over-represented in US.



House or apartment?
Conversation split consistent across UK and US, suggesting that houses are under-represented in both instances.



The rooms most mentioned alongside energy costs
The kitchen is most represented, but the proliferation of renters ensures that bedroom mentions remain high.



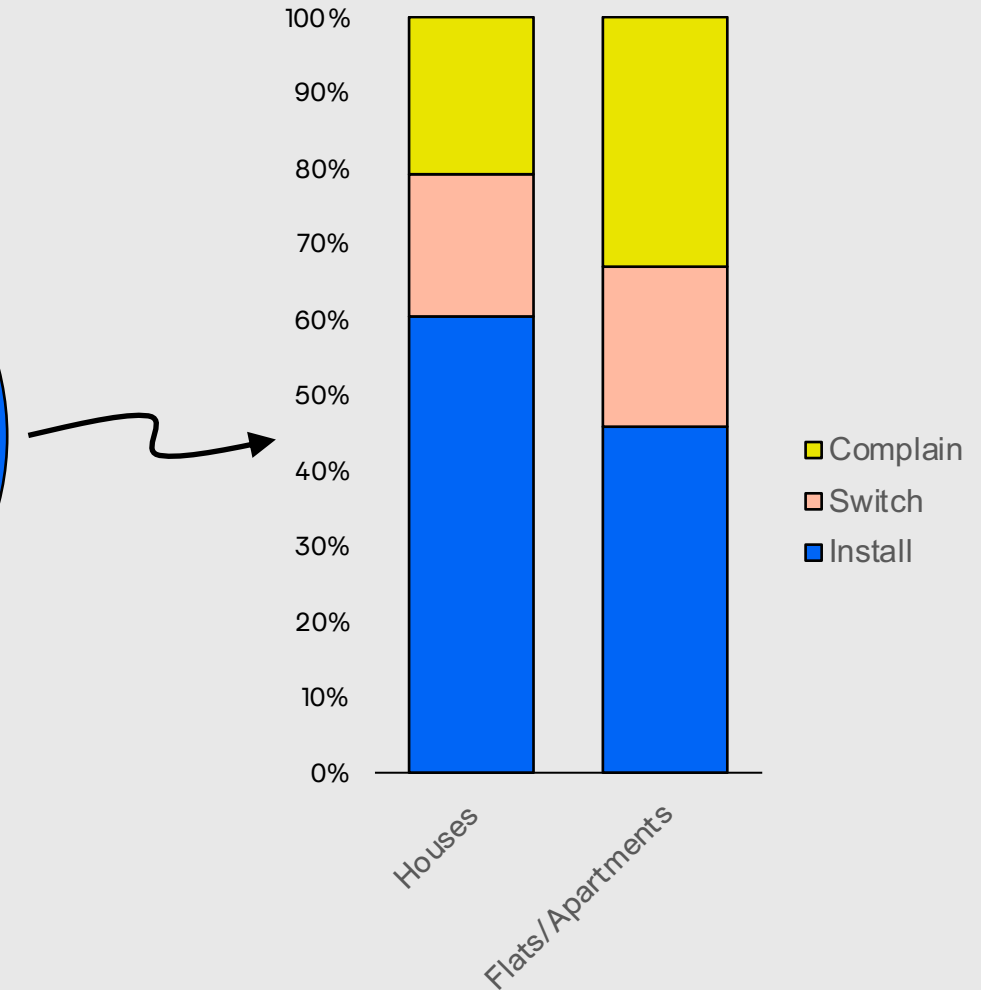
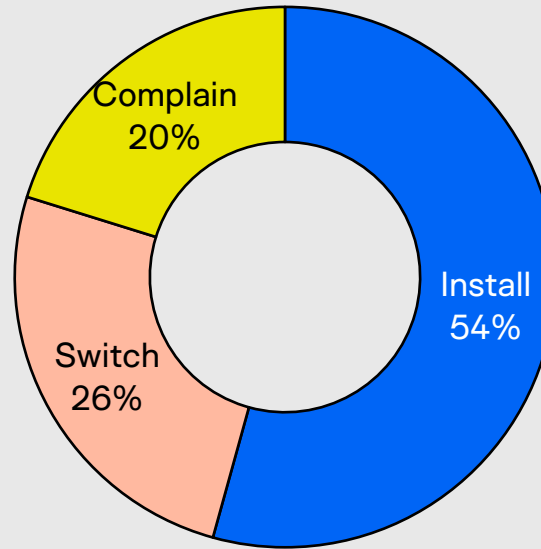
The very old, and the very new
Pre-war (US) and Georgian, Victorian & Edwardian properties (UK), are under-represented, due the homeowner's differing exposure to energy crisis costs.

The active measures consumers discuss taking

Alongside continual economising, there are a number of single-step actions that individuals discuss taking. These include installations, switching which companies they purchase energy from, and issuing official complaints or legal action.

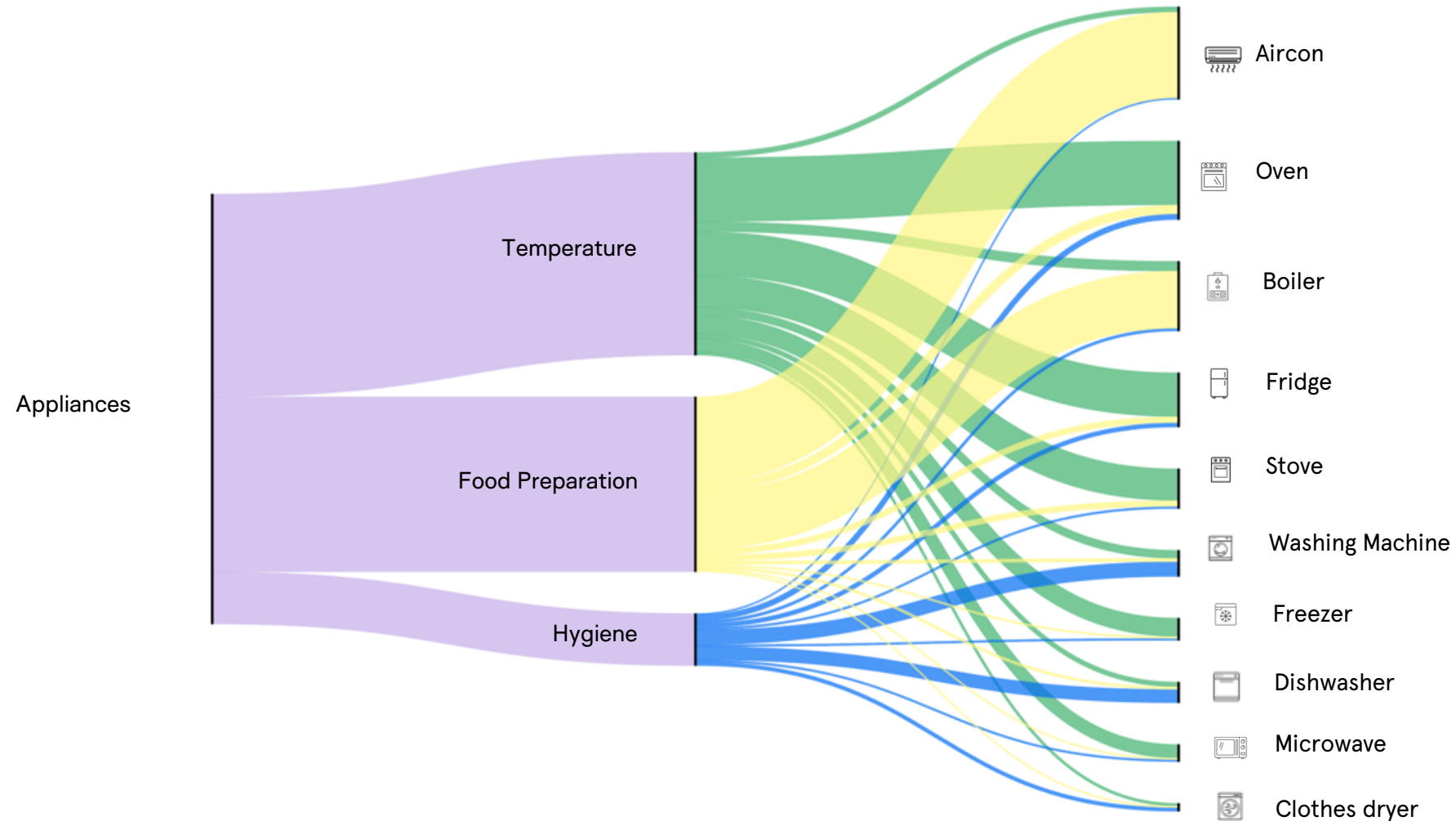
Despite the large cost barriers that surround the act of installation, it remains the largest – suggesting also that consumers do not view the current energy crisis as a one-off. Switching suppliers has a limited effect, given the universality of the issue – something that is reflected in the frustrated tone of many such posts. Strong complaints, meanwhile, appear to emerge when existing CX issues are magnified by the sums of money being debited.

The types of action taken also appear to follow on from the types of property. Houses, with more potential inefficiencies and a higher percentage of homeowners, see a greater emphasis on installation.



How much do different household appliances account for discussion?

While UK-based conversations account for many of the mentions visualized here, a very active strand of US conversation ensures that aircon over-indexes emerges as the most mentioned appliance. This appears a consequence of its award position essential, in so much as it runs constantly, and a luxury, given as it does not support basic functions in the same way food preparation appliances do.

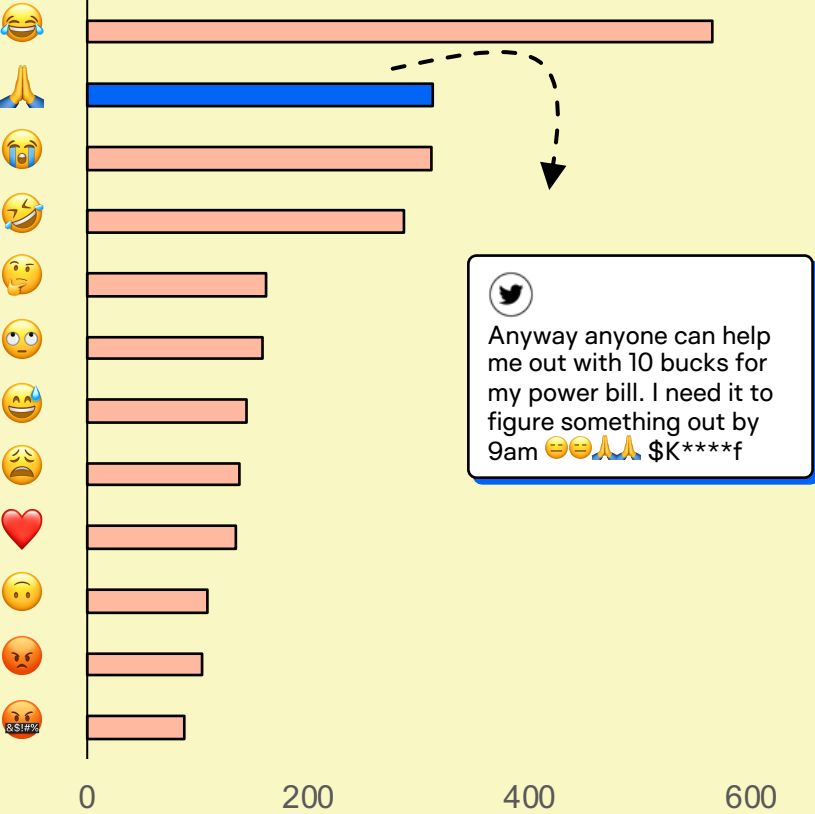
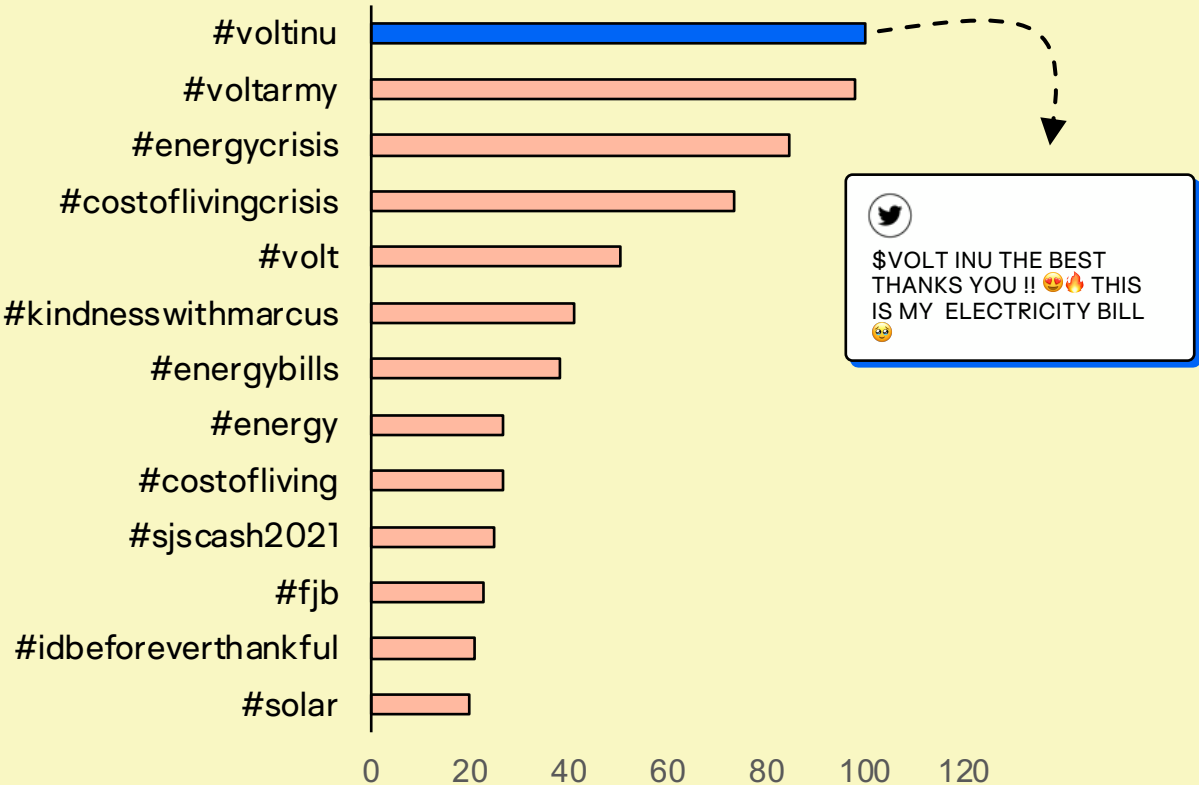


Online hashtag and emoji usage shows energy bill desperation

Trends show users asking directly for help with energy bills, as well as dark humor

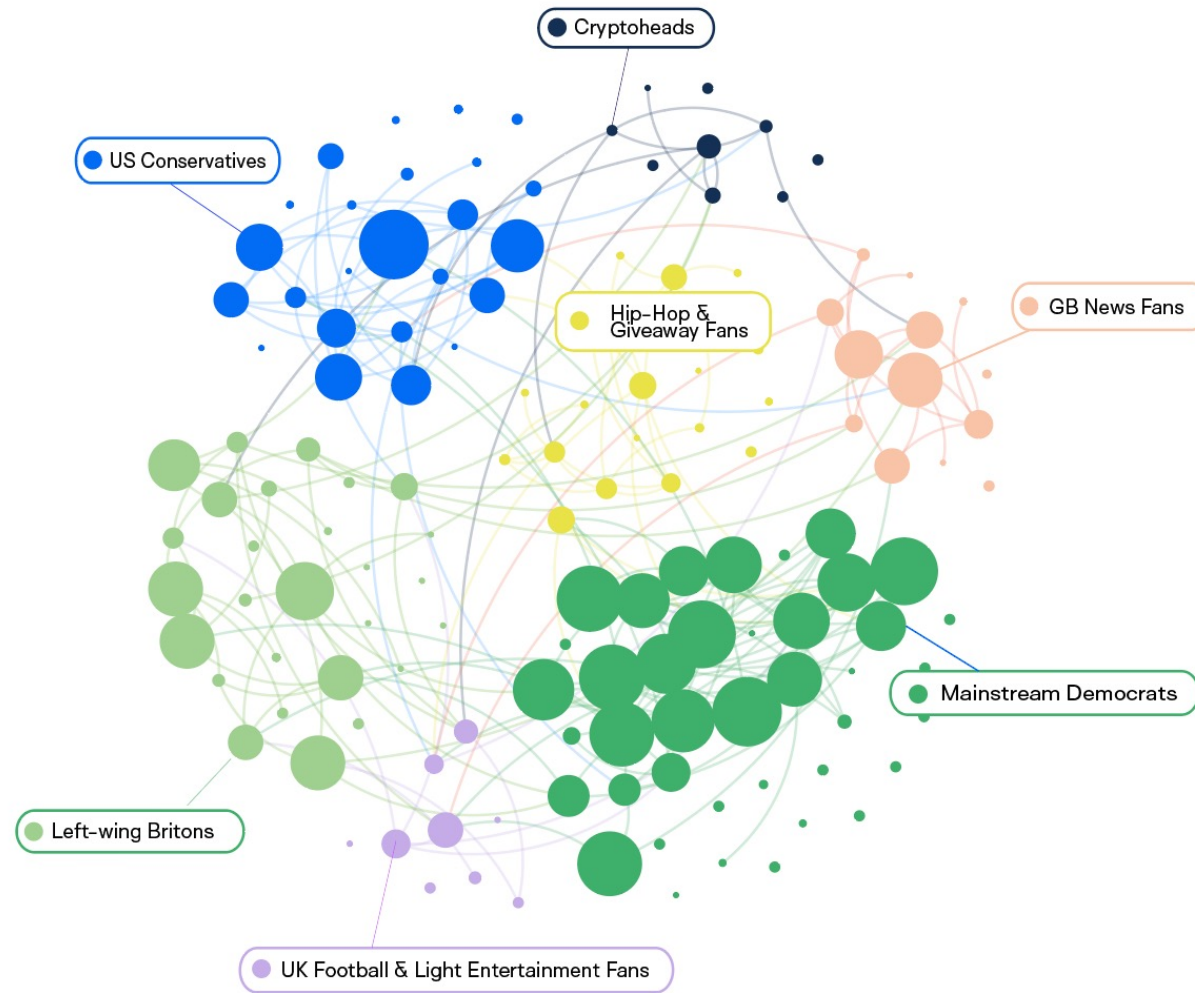
Crypto company Volt Inu is prominent in energy conversation after offering to pay people's energy bills. Many hashtags here are used along with pictures of users' bills as they ask for them to be paid.

We see dark humor with audiences making jokes and criticizing energy prices. These are made in conjunction with laughing emojis 😂 and 🤔, as well as more 'niche' emojis such as 🤑, 🤔 and 🤑.



Who's talking about personal energy costs online?

The communities engaging with the topic can be broadly split into three distinct groups:



Political Affiliations

Clearly, the energy crisis has become a deeply politicised topic. Even when focusing our analysis on personal experience, rather than political cut-and-thrust, we see that individuals with a strong affinity to one of the UK and US's main political parties are far more likely to engage in this conversation online

Mainstream Cultural Communities

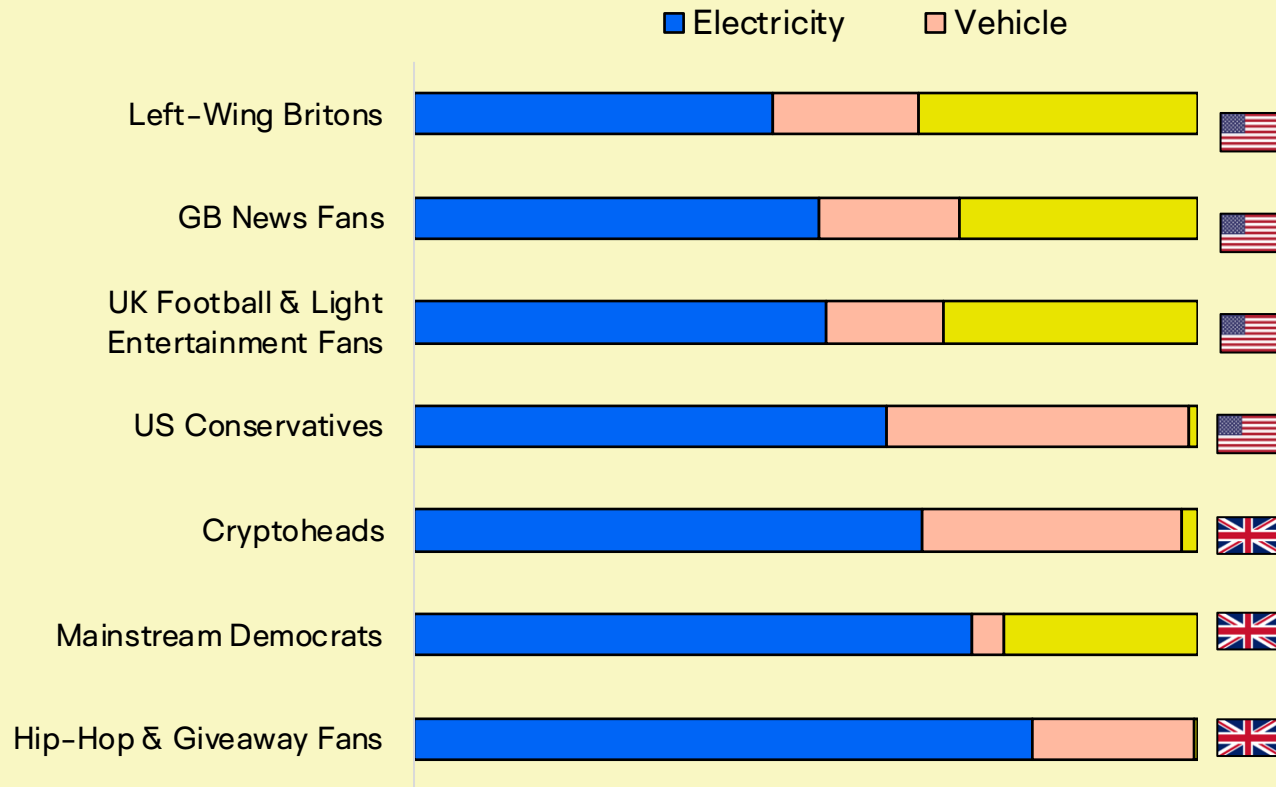
These communities incorporate fans of hip-hop artists and giveaway platforms in the US, and of football and mainstream light entertainment in the UK. They confirm that the energy crisis has become a topic of vital concern for many within working class populations on either side of the pacific.

Cryptoheads

The outlier in many senses, this community actually overlaps with both previous groups. A number of anti-Biden investors blend criticism of federal authority with conversation of their own investments, while a number also make pleas to the #voltarmy.

What is each community talking about?

While these distinct communities share some commonalities – such a frustration that energy crisis is, or has been ‘allowed’ to happen – the precise topics under discussions shift depending on who’s doing the talking.



Alongside continual economising, there are a number of single-step actions that individuals discuss taking. These include installations, switching which companies they purchase energy from, and issuing official complaints or legal action.

Despite the large cost barriers that surround the act of installation, it remains the largest – suggesting also that consumers do not view the current energy crisis as a one-off. Switching suppliers has a limited effect, given the universality of the issue – something that is reflected in the frustrated tone of many such posts. Strong complaints, meanwhile, appear to emerge when existing CX issues are magnified by the sums of money being debited.

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Where does this conversation play out online?

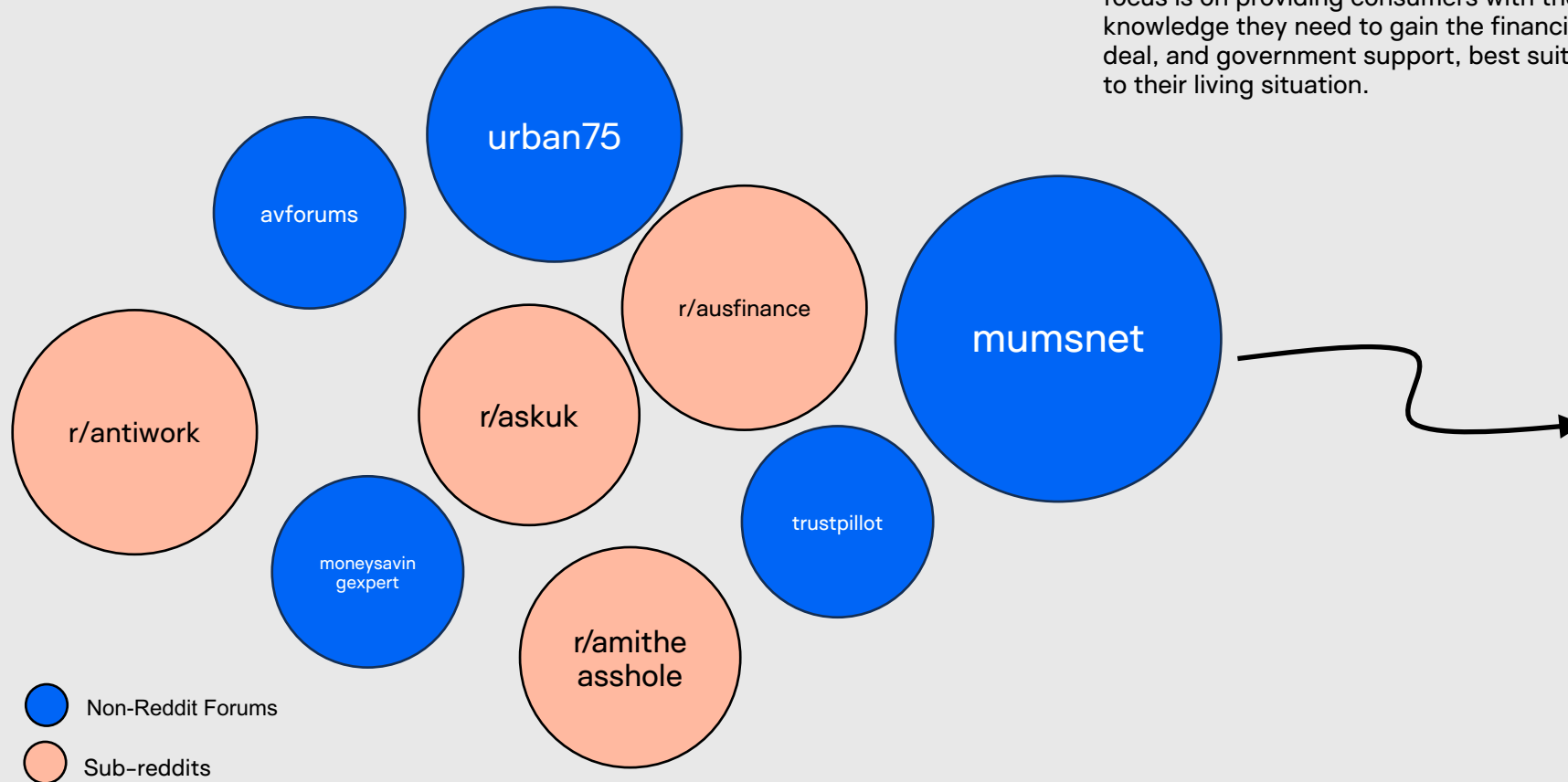
Mumsnet is a UK-based forum that hosts communities of mothers as they share perspectives on anything from child-rearing to political affiliation. The forum is noted for being embroiled in social and political controversies.


Over the energy crisis it has become a popular space for financial advice, which ranges from realistic levels of energy use, to strategies for approaching unpaid bills to councils or businesses:

We see similar trends on the Money Saving Expert forum, as well the popular subreddit r/frugal. In the case of the former, the focus is on providing consumers with the knowledge they need to gain the financial deal, and government support, best suited to their living situation.

In the case of the latter, meanwhile, similar conversations intermingle with workaday solutions surround building installations and methods of boiling water.

These subreddits host a variety of different conversations, from the location specific (r/askuk), to the politicized (r/antiwork), to the darkly humorous (r/amitheasshole).





I've asked for a payment plan, but the minimum payment they're saying they'll allow me is the total cost of the bill I owe. They want over a grand off me in one go at this point

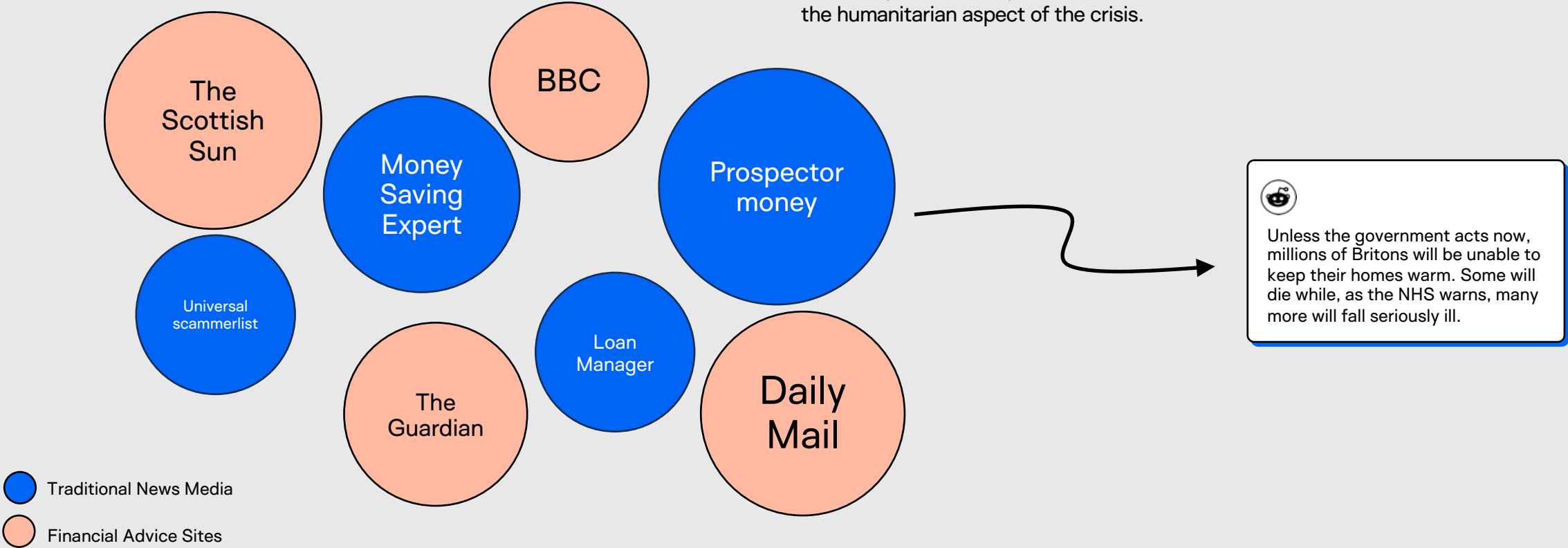
What sources inform the energy cost conversation?

Mainstream news sources intersperse with financial advice sites focused on personal stories and tips for coping with the energy crisis. Many have shared coverage from both The Scottish Sun and The Daily Mail, which focus on the unexpected tips and tricks that have helped readers cope with rising energy costs.

An article that proved popular with those who shared media links featured a particularly unusual way to lower energy bills – by recreating a medieval tile stove to heat the home.

Conversely, more left-wing publications tent to portray the crisis on a macro-level, and with a less humorous lens. Many shared coverage from The Guardian, for instance, that centred on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis.

In the spirit of sharing genuine, practicable advice, however, individuals appear far more likely to share articles from the likes of Money Saving Expert. This is not to suggest a wave of financial white knights riding to the rescue, however, as several of these sites appear to host clickbait-y articles that appear to ascribe a number of easy ‘fixes’ to the crisis.

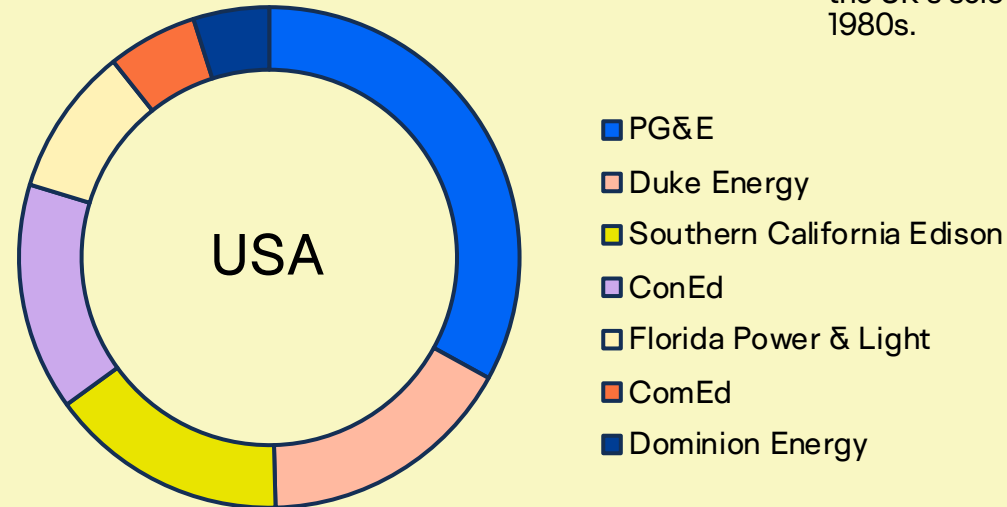
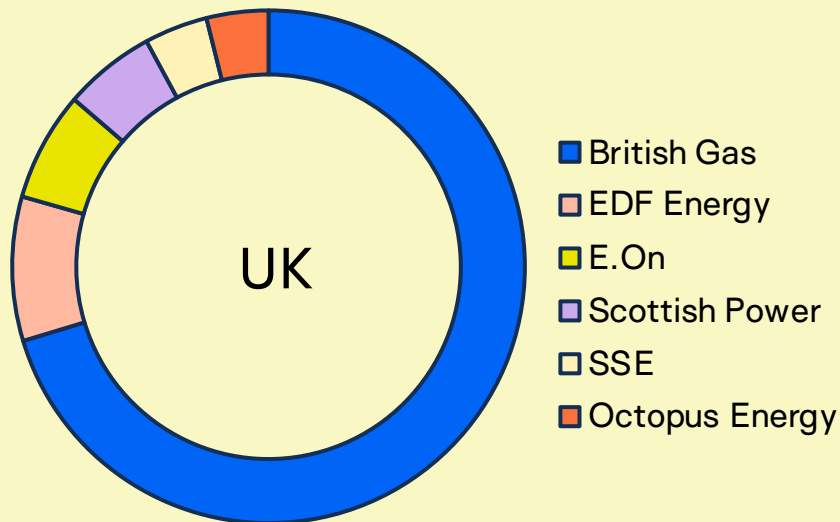


How does the discussion about brands differ in the UK and US?

The way the UK discusses energy suppliers is significantly more connected to specific brands than in the US. In part, this is due to its position as smaller nation with far fewer consumer energy brands than the US (where suppliers often differ state by state).

This has led to UK audiences being able to easily name and recognise suppliers and discuss their shared experiences. In the US, however, the proliferation of brands means such associations remain highly fractured.

Some of the suppliers in the US with the largest user bases (including PG&E and Southern California Edison, both of which service large parts of California) do experience more conversations than most, showing that when there is a strong concentration of users and/or brand awareness in a certain locale, messaging can be directed at a potent audience in the states. But this cannot hope to match the brand recognition directed at British Gas, the UK's sole supplier up until the 1980s.



PULSAR*

Pulsar is the leading AI-powered audience intelligence platform, combining conversational and behavioral signals from the world's leading digital sources to help organizations understand their audiences and create messages that matter to them.

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