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Transactions & Reactions: The Online Credit Card Conversation

The conversations, behaviors and audiences behind providers Visa, Mastercard and American Express

Credit keeps the world economy moving, with Visa, Mastercard and American Express brand names easily identifiable across the globe.

For most the world, most of the time, these providers have traditionally been part of the world's invisible machinery. And yet, looking at the sharp incline in social mentions from 2019 to 2022, we can see a definitive shift taking place, with each of these brands increasingly becoming part of conversations taking place around the world.

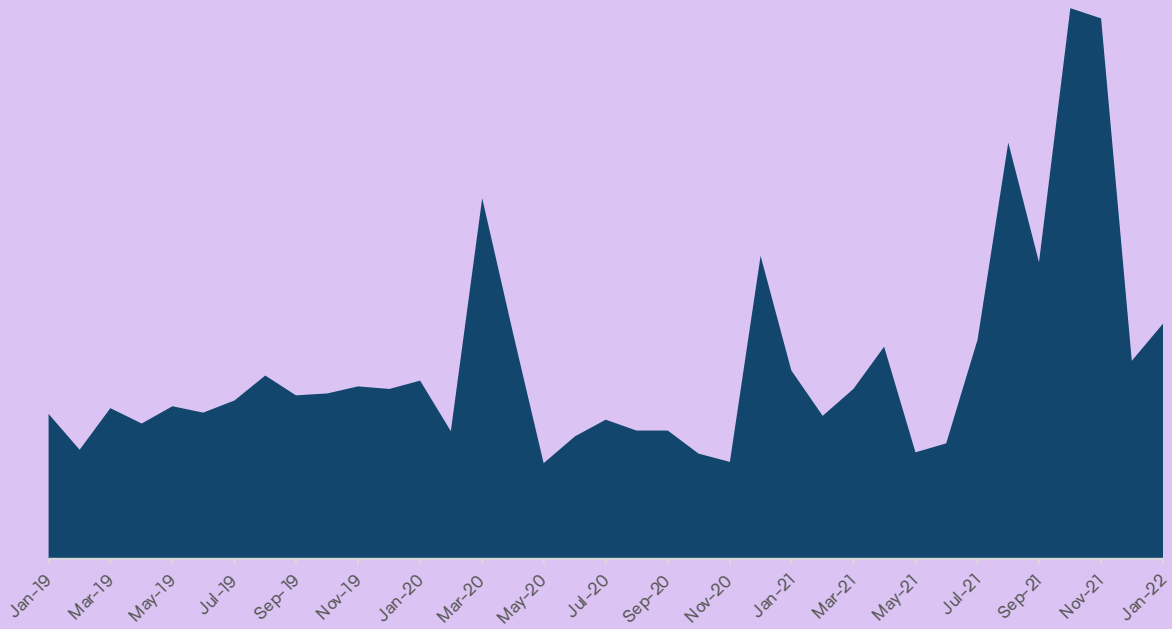
Within this report, we'll be exploring:

- The different associations that attach to each brand
- The audiences engaging in the global conversation
- How spending behaviors and customer incentives intersect with these different audiences and online communities

To do so, we analyzed over half a million English-language posts between October 2021 – February 2022, from the UK, USA, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Laos and Brunei.

The data sources, meanwhile, include:

- Twitter
- Reddit
- Forums



Twitter mentions of Visa, Mastercard and American Express Jan 2019 - Jan 2022.
Source: Pulsar TRENDS

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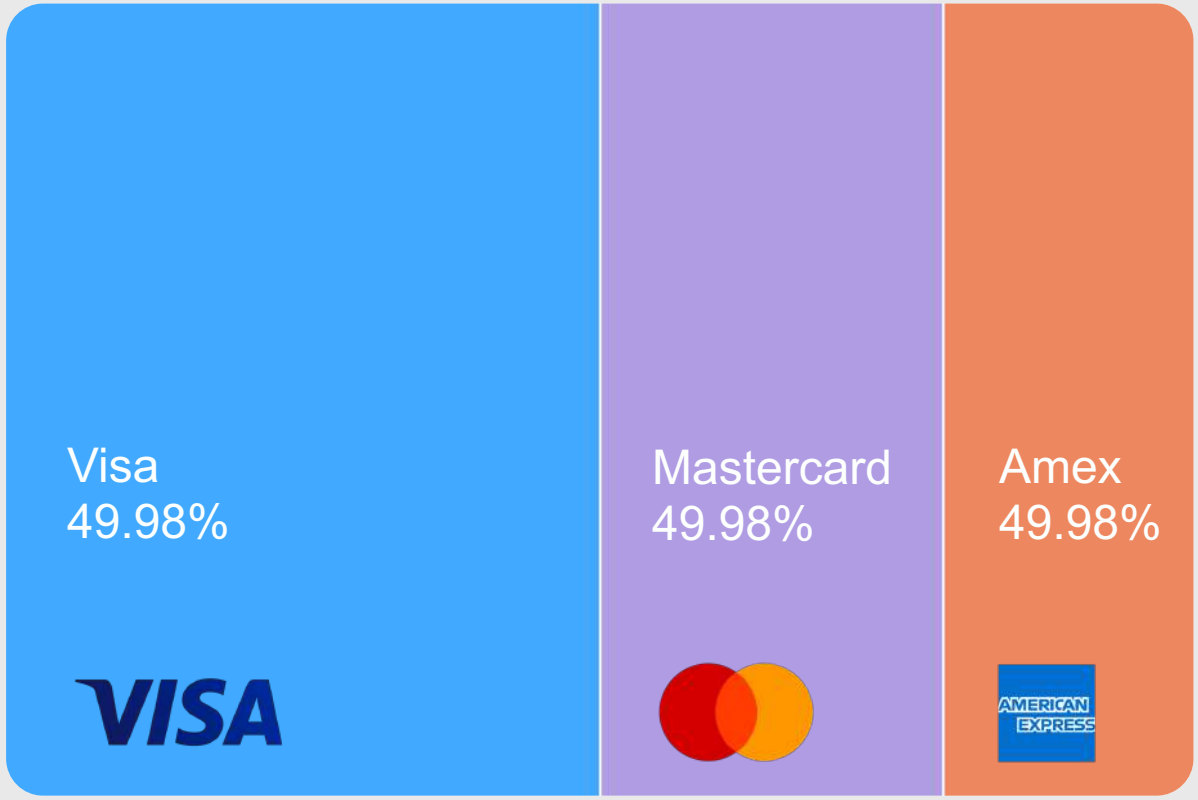
Visa: The Most Discussed Provider Internationally

From January 2019 onwards, we see Visa emerge by some distance as the most-mentioned provider on Twitter, accounting for almost as much conversation as the other two combined.

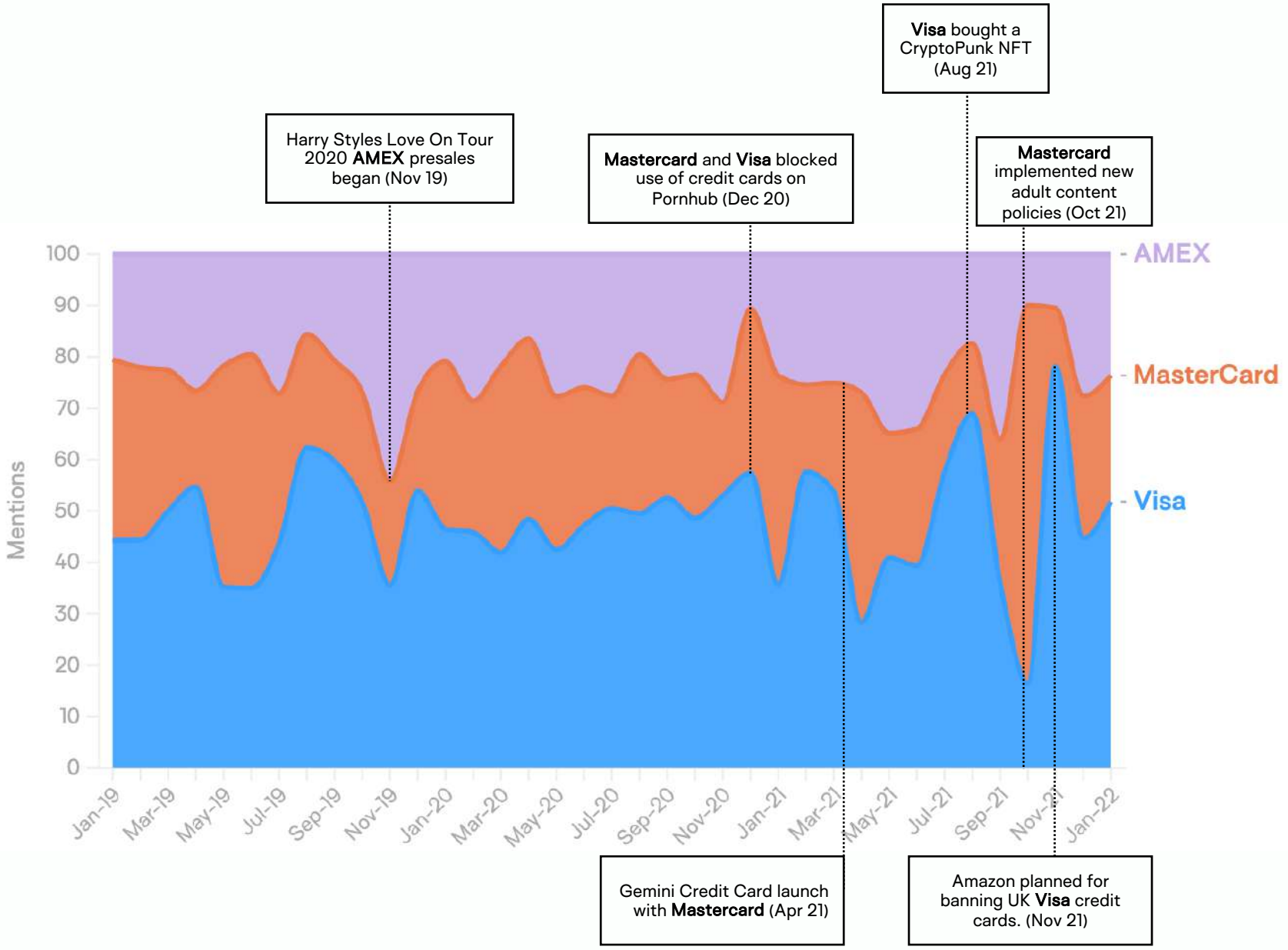
And this trend is only accentuated when expanding the search from October 2021 – February 2022 to incorporate Reddit, Blogs, Forums and Trustpilot, bringing Visa's total SOV within this period to 53%.

Why? As we shall see, the Visa brand was much more closely linked the news and hype cycles. Stories circulated outlining how the provider's relationship with different providers and platform would soon be subject to change in the wake of technological and political upheaval – even if several of these developments would ultimately be rowed back on.



The Shifting Emphases Driven by the News Cycle

What's immediately obvious from this timeline? That the most newsworthy, and discussed, stories are clustered in the most recent period. Clearly, the disruptions taking place across society have intersected with more demographics spending increased time online. The result is that these online spaces increasingly reflect the responses of both financially or technologically literate groups, on forums and subsections of Twitter, and also the perspectives of laypeople, as they share instinctive responses or ask for advice.



Twitter mentions of Visa, Mastercard and AMEX, Jan 2019 - Jan 2022.
Source: Pulsar TRENDS

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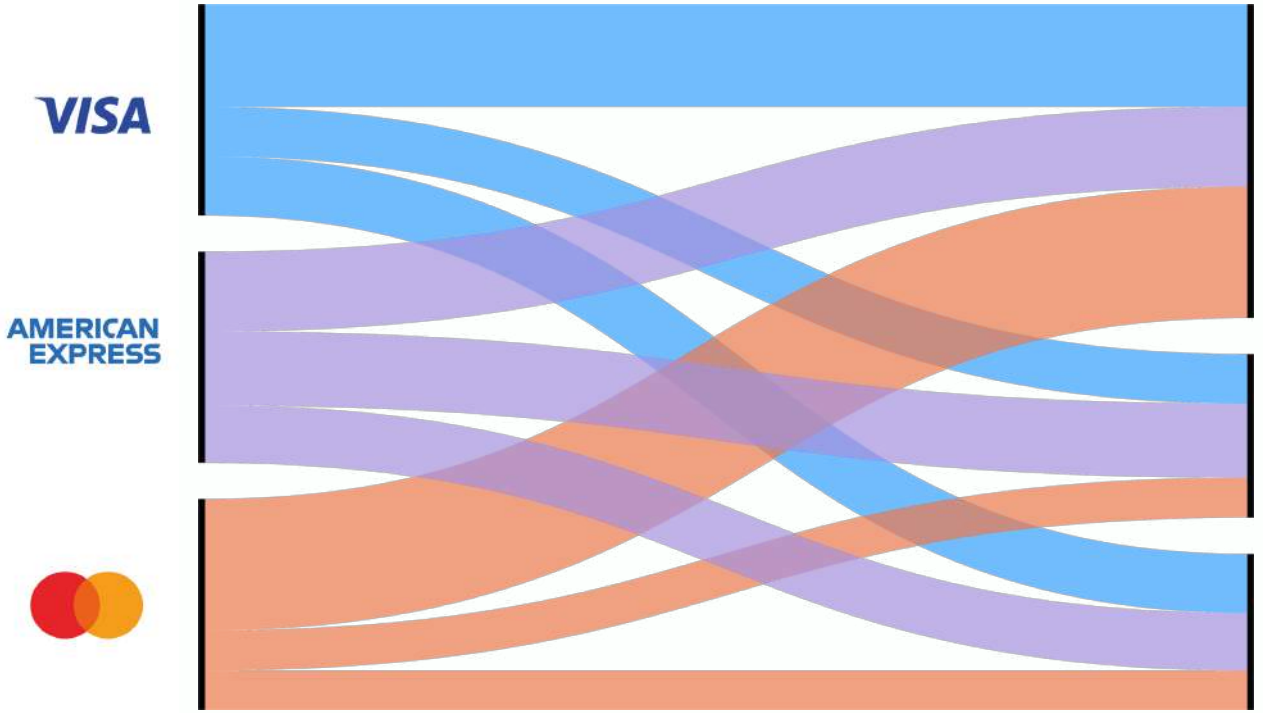
Small but Significant Variation in the Tone of Voice around Each Provider

For many individuals, there is little in day-to-day usage that distinguishes these brands from one another. However, the news cycle combines with instances of personal experience, good and bad, that see each brand over-index to some extent

extent for Confidence (often regarding technological innovation or social initiatives), Confusion (which ties more closely to the customer experience) and Curiosity.

This latter category sits somewhere at the intersection of the previous two, referring as it does to trends, initiatives or innovations of which the poster has not yet established an opinion.



Confident (Mastercard)

> Excited to be planting trees with every purchase and tracking my progress to eliminate my carbon footprint every month with @Aspiration @Mastercard using Mastercard cards.

Tentative (Visa)

> @AmazonUK this is just for visa credit card isn't it? – i think mine is visa debt – all a bit confusing

Inquisitive (AMEX)

> Why is Amex such a big thing for wealthy business people? where's the unique selling point? genuinely curious.

Mentions of card networks in association with sentiments within the Credit Cards conversation across Twitter, Reddit, Blogs, Forums and Trustpilot, Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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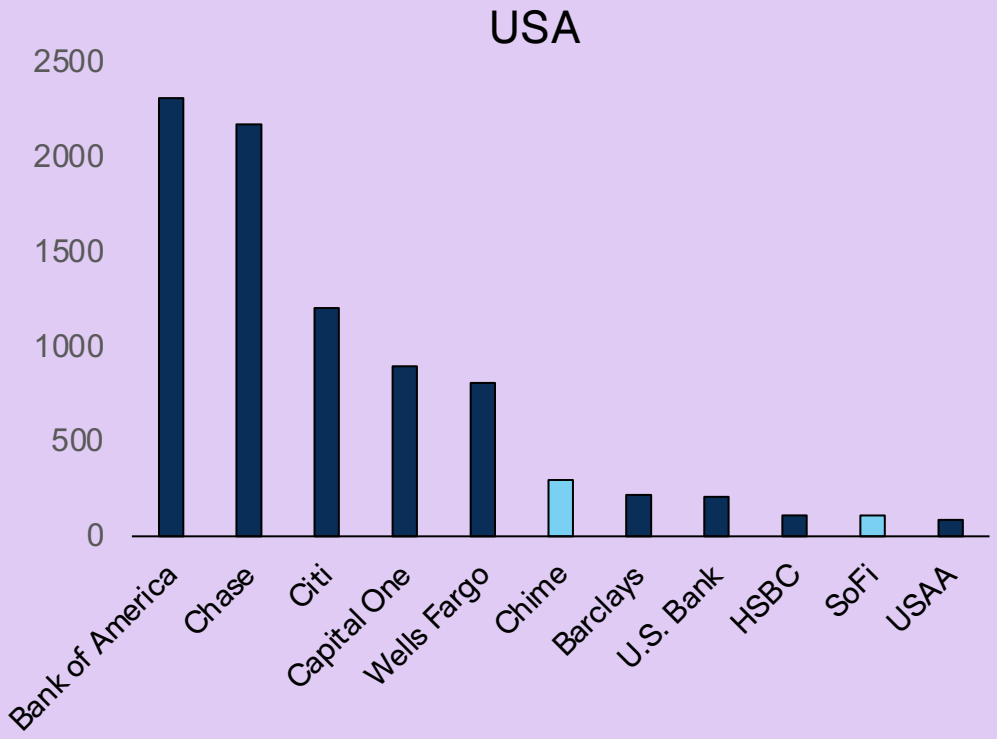
The Traditional Associations: Banks

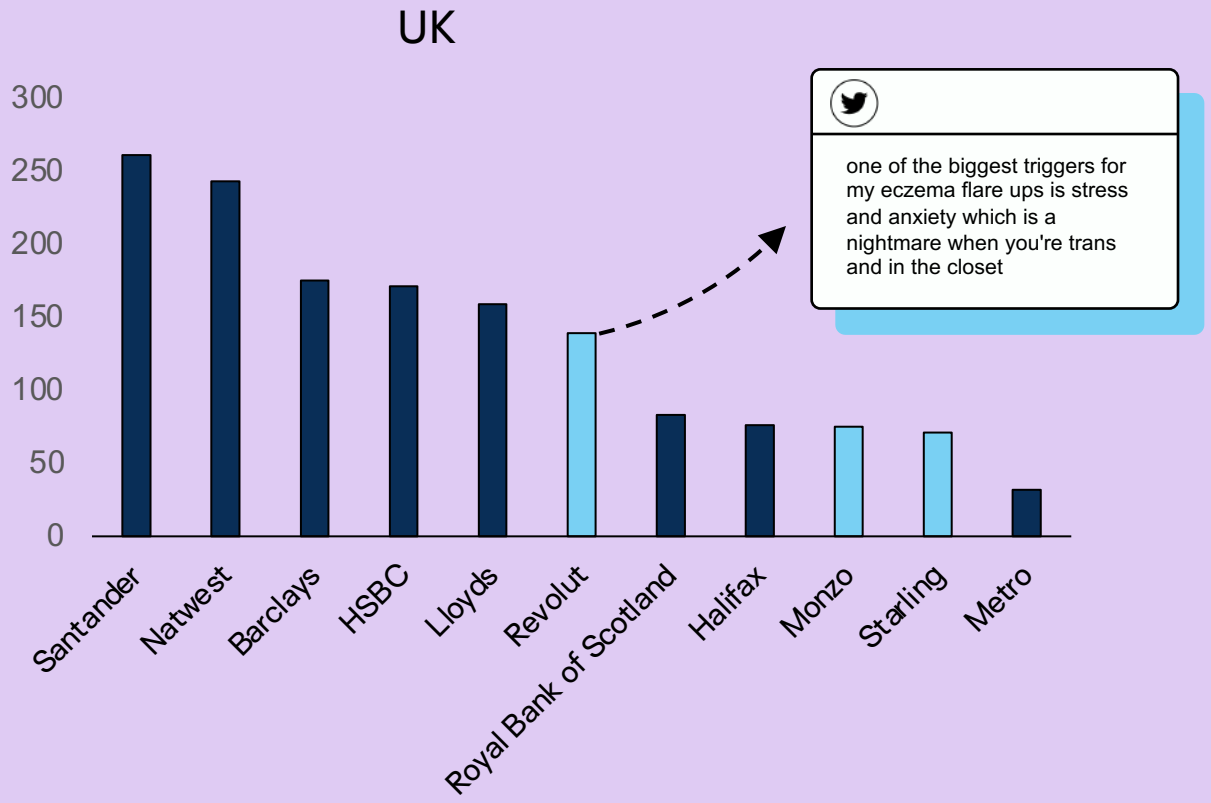
Banks are, unsurprisingly, the institution type most associated with credit cards. Within this, though, we see a notable difference between banks with significant presences in the USA and UK.

Challenger Neobanks account for a far greater proportion of the total conversation amongst British institutions. This reflects the fact that this type of institution has greater user penetration on one side of the Atlantic.

In the US, posts referring to Neobanks incorporate numerous forum posts in which individuals share advice or solicit services related to currency exchange or investing.

Within the UK, meanwhile, banks such as Revolut appear more normalized, and more likely to occur in non-specialized finance conversations.





Mentions of banks associated with credit cards within the Credit Cards conversation across Twitter, Reddit, Blogs, Forums and Trustpilot, Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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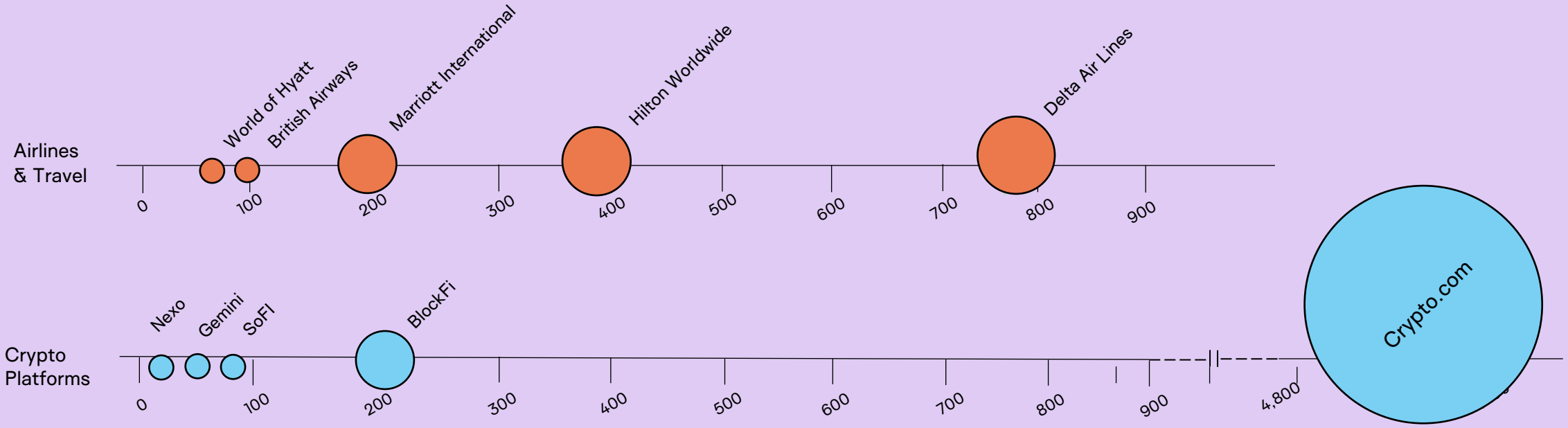
Comparing Travel & Crypto Credit Card Mentions

Of course, it's not only banks who issue credit cards. Airlines, hotels and retailers have historically offered their own versions, with benefits tied to the goods or service offered. These cards generate online conversation, but have ceded share of voice to offerings from Amazon and, more recently, Apple.

More seismic still is the rise of crypto. Blockchain technologies have seen a significant upsurge in mentions of the major credit card brands – a trend shows no sign of slowing down. And it's not just spam, or meaningless retweets either. The online conversation appears to reflect a largescale, and genuine optimism on the part of crypto enthusiasts.

Digging into this conversation, the two prevailing moods appear excitement and curiosity. Individuals provide or solicit information around using, ordering or upgrading their Crypto.com Credit Cards. The online discussion sees self-expression intersect with financial advice.



Mentions of airlines/travel and crypto platforms in association with credit cards across Twitter, Reddit, Blogs, Forums and Trustpilot, Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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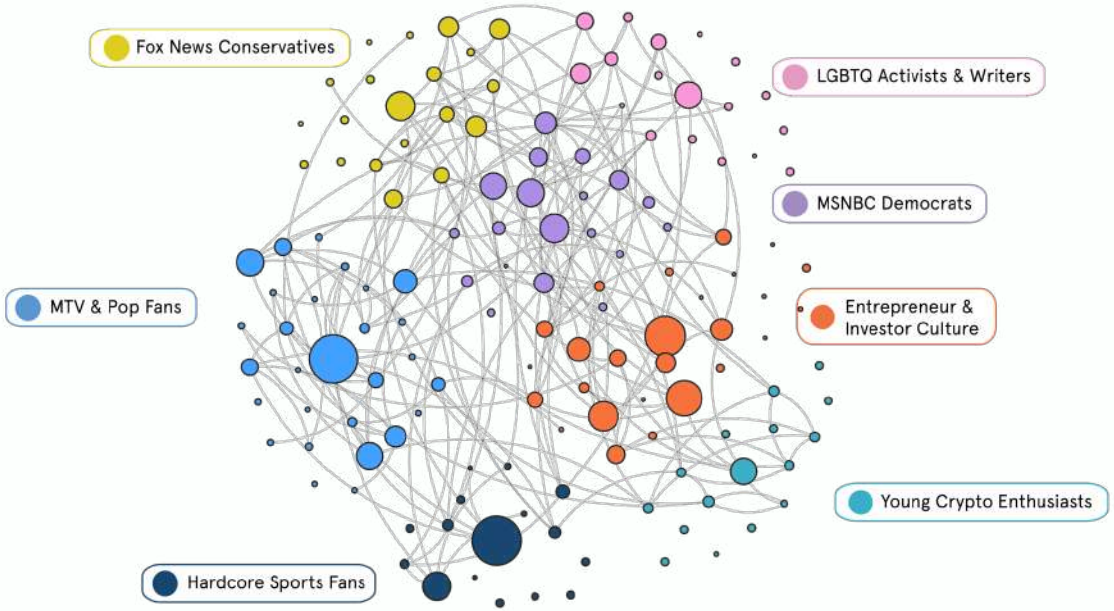
Who's Participating in the Conversation around Credit Cards?

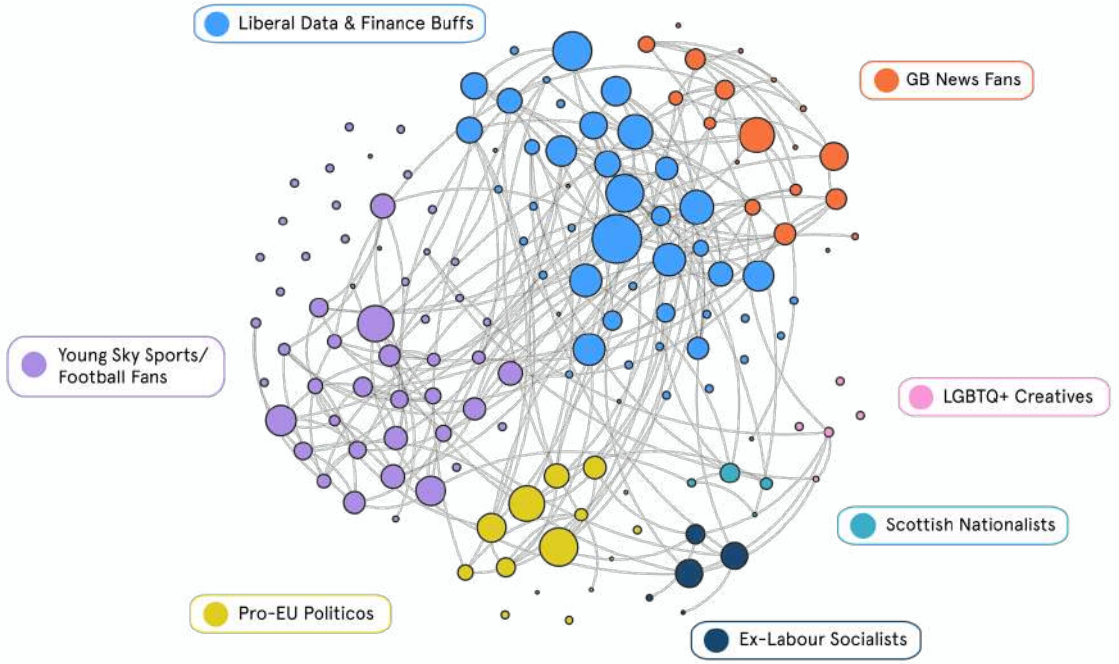
Credit Cards attract a host of different opinions, which emanate from across society. Using Pulsar's Communities integration, we can cluster these different audience segments according to their shared online behaviors and affinities.

The number of notes reflects the size of that particular community, while the size of the nodes indicates the degree to which it is connected to others taking part in the wider conversation.

USA



UK



US and UK audience segments in the Credit Cards conversation on Twitter, Oct 12 2021 – Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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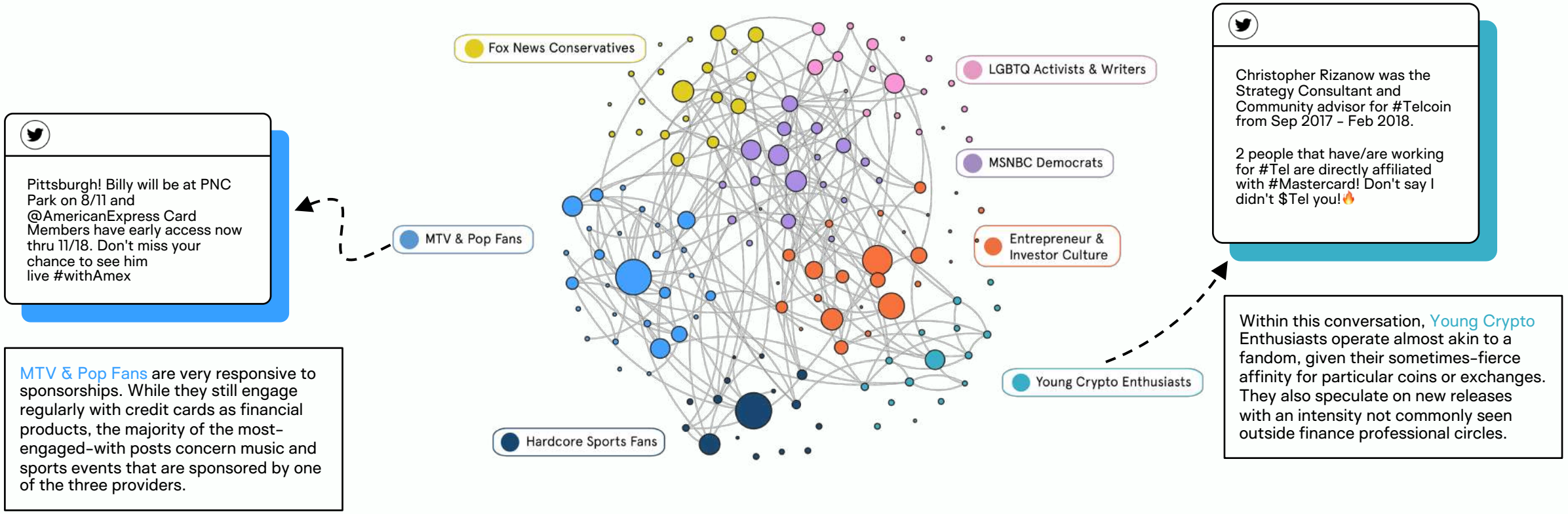
The US Credit Card Conversation Spans a Cross-Section of Society

As might be expected from such a universal topic, the US communities engaging with credit cards is varied and broadly reflective of society. The communities with an entrenched political leaning that takes its cues from mainstream television networks tend to be older, while more youthful MTV & Pop Fans and Young Crypto Enthusiasts bookend the other end of the conversation.

If these broadly Gen-Z groups are indicative of future behaviors, then they appear to usher in contrasting models of engagement – while the former engage frequently with sponsorships an activities that sit at a remove from the provider's core services, the latter view themselves as not only financially literate, but revolutionary.



The US audience segments in the Credit Cards conversation on Twitter, Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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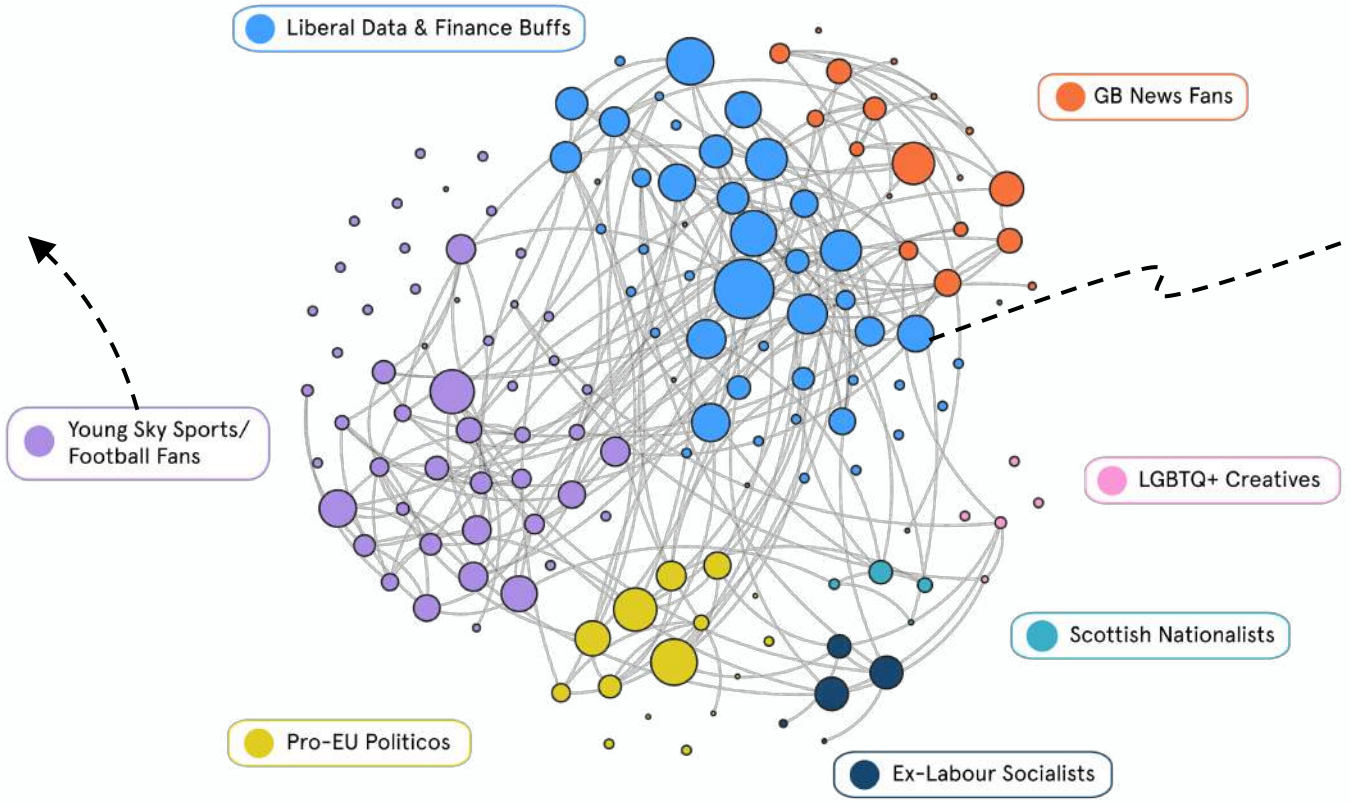
Political Debate Jostles with the Customer Experience for UK Audiences

Within the UK, credit card providers attract deeply politicized dialogues, following Amazon's Brexit-related, and ultimately rescinded, decision to no longer accept Visa. If we remove direct references to Brexit, to tie the conversation studied a little closer to the lived experience of using credit cards, we nonetheless see political groupings emerge, particularly along the lines of Europe.

We also see some equivalence with the US communities. Young Sky Sports/Football Fans are British fusing of the MTV & Pop Fans and Hardcore Sports Fans flagged previously. Likewise, the Liberal Data & Finance Buffs reflect the political leanings, and some of the readership habits, of MSNBC, together with an interest in crypto.



I don't want anything for my birthday just please increase the limit on the Amex gold babe my enemy's are close

Similar to the MTV & Pop Fans, this community frequently reference sponsorship deals, such as Mastercard's of the Brit Awards. In fact, in the case of Brighton & Hove Albion's Amex stadium, we see a number of individuals for whom the word is more synonymous football than finance. Elsewhere. This community appears quick to both take customer service complaints online, as well as use humor as a framing device.

The giants are stamping their feet again`. Amazon made $8bn profit in 3 months this year - it can easily take the hit if Visa doesn't blink. As ever though it's the customers who are inconvenienced (see also Epic v Apple).

This segment follow financial journalists, as well as influencers from within the world of data science. They tend to offer up opinions and engage with articles that touch on both political issues, such as the Visa-Amazon farrago, as well technical issues, such as moving to the cloud

The US audience segments in the Credit Cards conversation on Twitter, Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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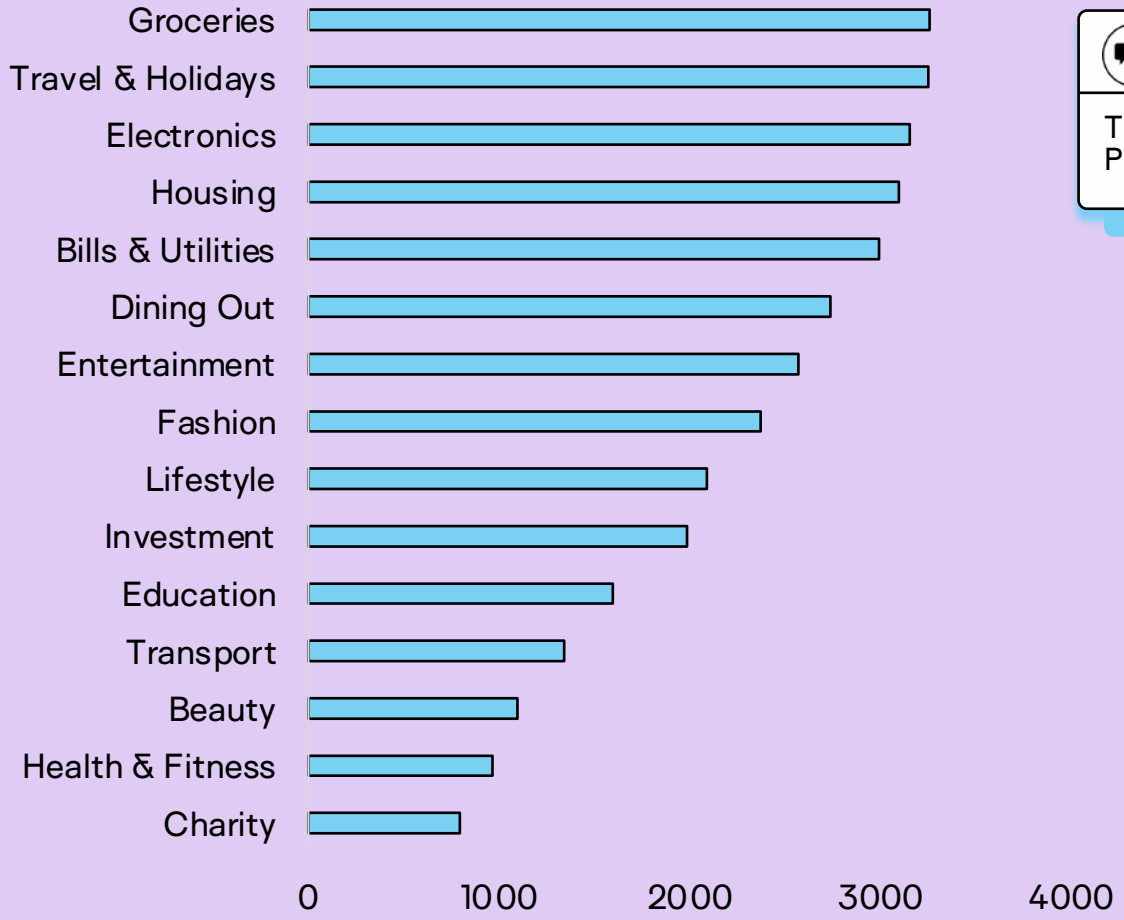
Food Dominates Spending Behaviors

A host of different spending behaviors are mentioned in conjunction with credit cards. And its Groceries that come out on top. In fact, when combined with Dining Out, ‘Food’ accounts for almost double as many mentions as the next largest category.

This conversation plays out in anecdotes around everyday usage, but also in instances where individuals debate switching or upgrading cards. In the following example, for instance, Groceries and Housing are categorized in the former category.

In the case of Electronics, meanwhile, we see conversations taking place on forums such as SlickDeals, where varying methods of payments are discussed in conjunction with buying phones, televisions and laptops.



TL;DR: Gold for regular shit, Platinum for travel shit

Spending segments within the Credit Cards conversation across Twitter, Forums, Blogs, Reddit and Trustpilot,Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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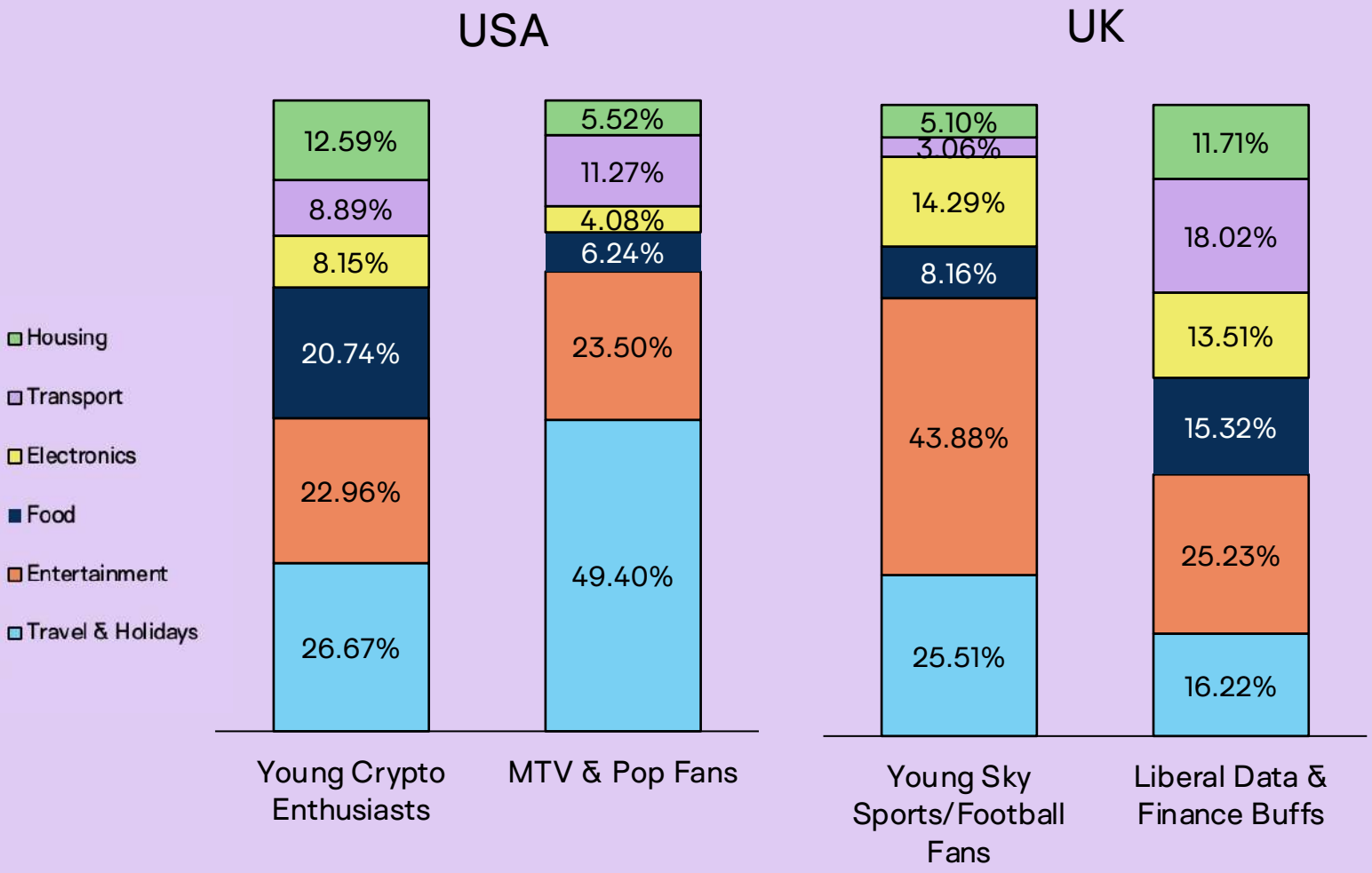
Spending Behaviors By Online Community

So how do these different spending behaviors map to the different communities already established?

In the US, MTV & Pop Fans over-index for mentions of Travel & Holidays. Amongst a variety of topics, it's the airport lounges flyers access with their card rewards that attract the lion's share of discussion – in particular, complaints about their staffing or condition.

Over in the UK, meanwhile, we see Young Sky Sports/Football Fans regularly take part in conversations around events. This incorporates venues or gigs that have partnered with providers, but also occasions in which cards are rejected my online booking platforms, driving prospective attendees to vent their emotions online.



Spending segments by community within the Credit Cards conversation across Twitter, Reddit, Blogs, Forums and Trustpilot, Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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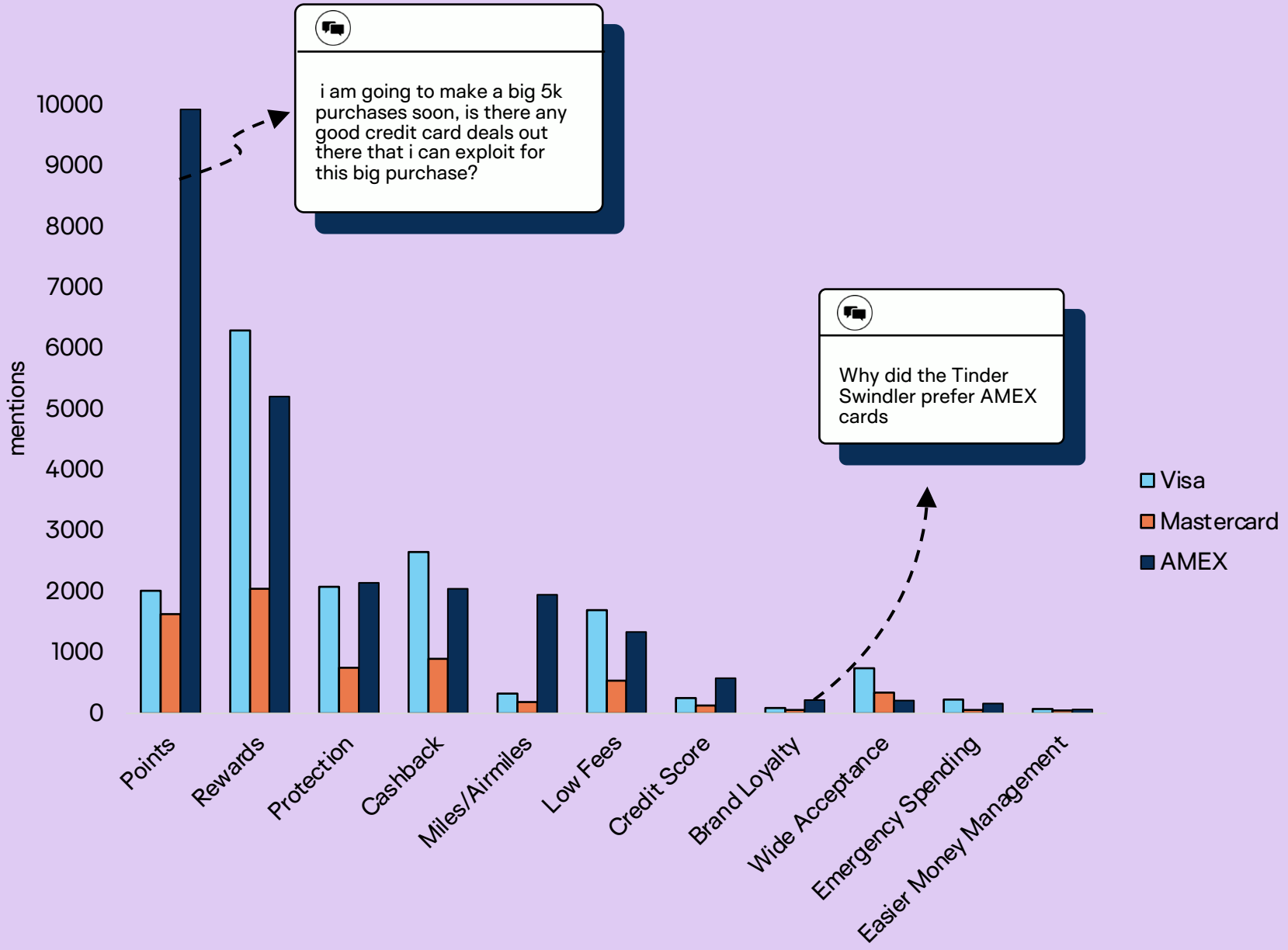
What Incentives Drive Adoption?

When it comes to debating individual incentives, a huge amount of this conversation takes place across forums. In the case of Amex, for instance, a popular query on such platforms centers on which other cards to pair with an Amex, to make best advantages of its points-based benefits.

We also find more individualized, specific requests, with one user requiring advice on coordinating the arrival of their new card with a big purchase. And that's set against larger scale trends. The most engaged-with posts within the Amex Points conversation all relate to upgrading: whether it's worthwhile, when to do it, and any number of more granular considerations.



Mentions of card incentives across different card networks within the Credit Cards conversation across Twitter, Reddit, Blogs, Forums and Trustpilot, Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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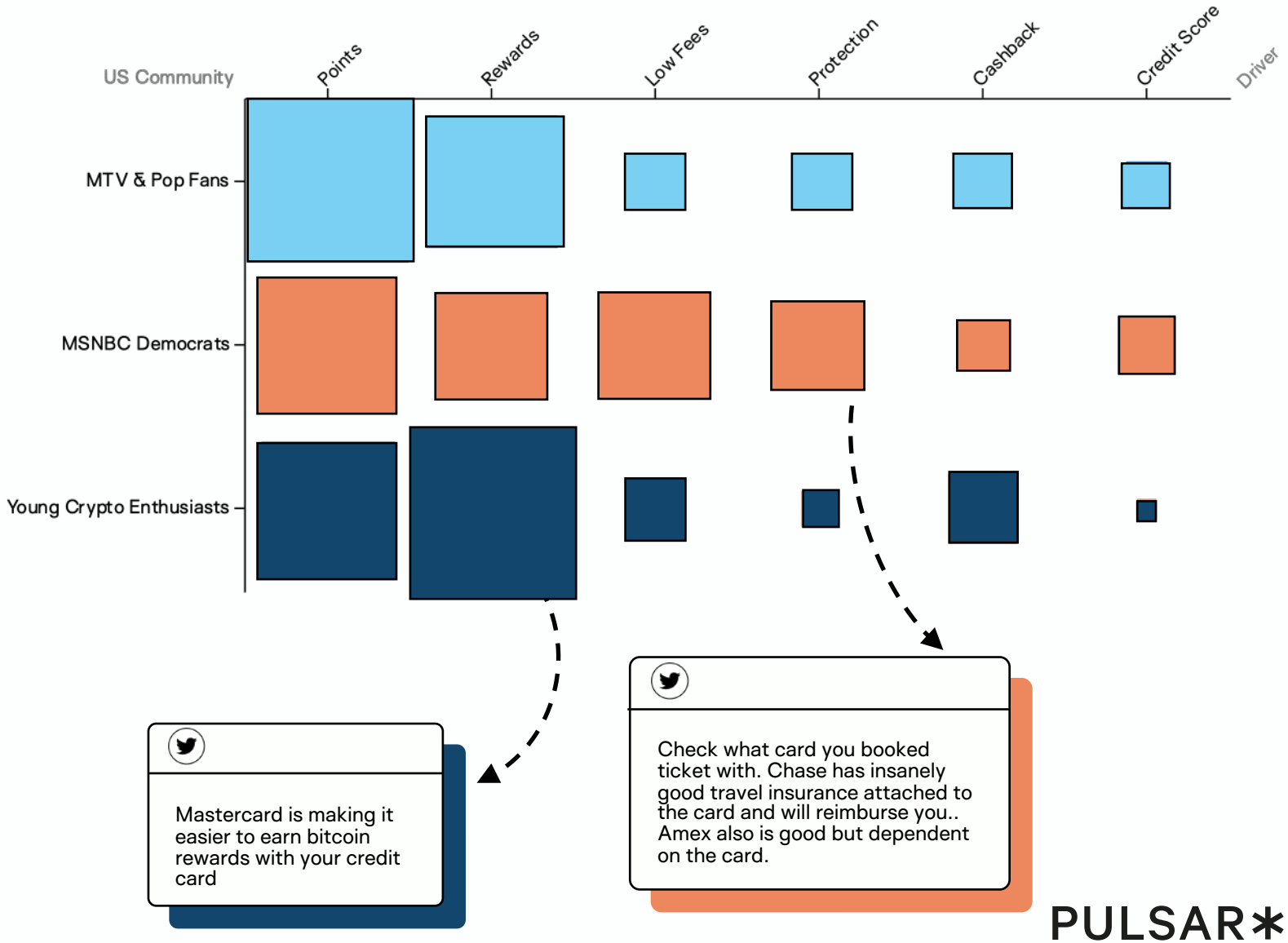
Mapping Incentives
by US Communities

When we map each incentive by audience segments previously highlighted in the US, we see several clear trends emerge.

Young Crypto Enthusiasts talk a lot about rewards. In addition to the novel cards from Crypto.com and elsewhere, this also refers to existing players making it possible to earn bitcoin rewards.

MSNBC Democrats, on the other hand, are far more likely to associate Low Fees and Protection with Cards than their younger cohorts.



Mentions of card incentives across the US communities within the Credit Cards across Twitter, Reddit, Blogs, Forums and Trustpilot, data normalized, Oct 12 2021 - Feb 22 2022. Source: Pulsar TRAC

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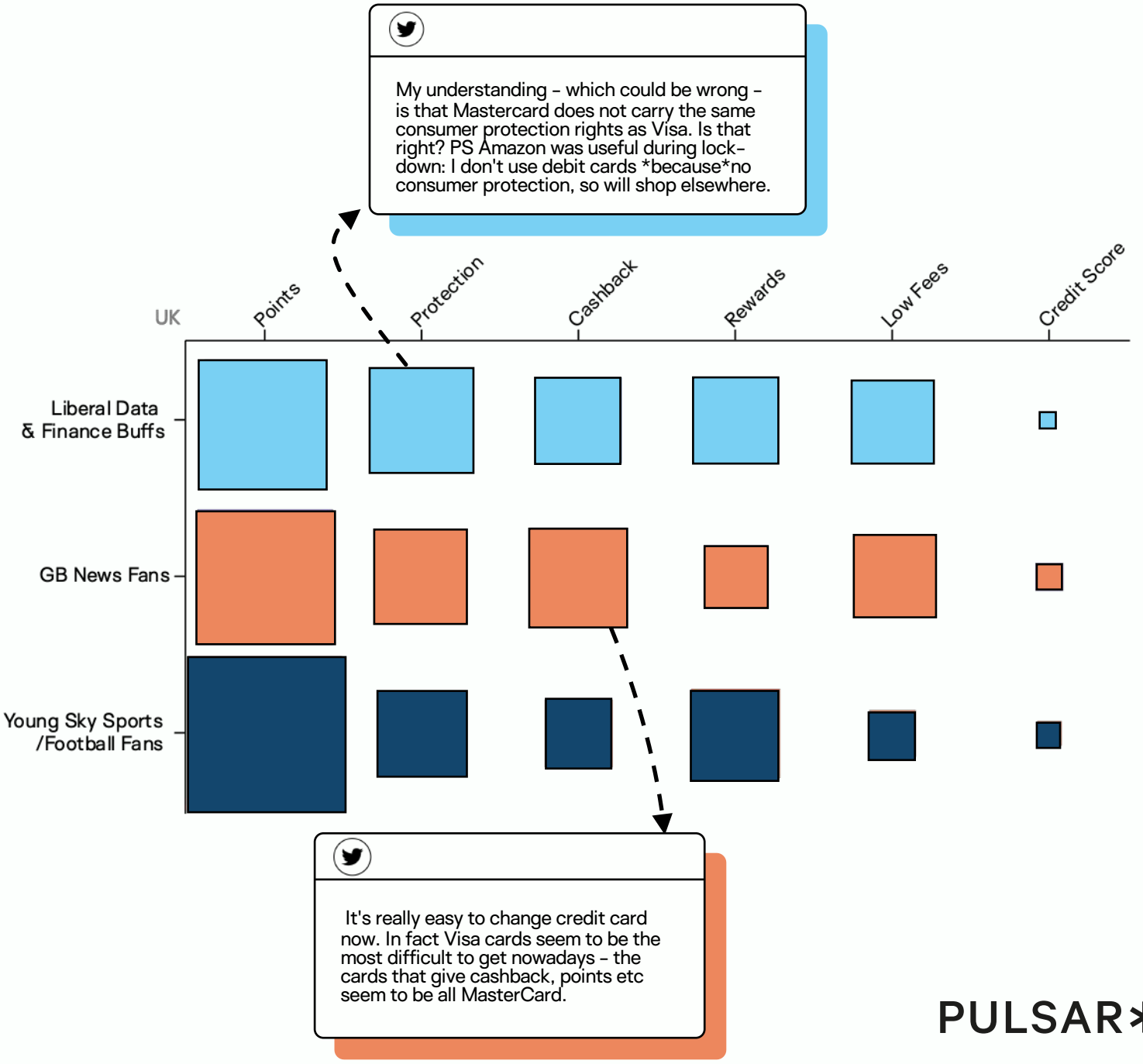
Mapping Incentives
by UK Communities

Over the UK, the Liberal Data & Finance Buff community frequently talk about protection. AS holds true with much of the group's online conversation, the discussions tend to be relatively informed, and often conducted with the intention of finding out new information.

GB News Fans, on the other hand, over-index for cashback as a topic. Together with the Liberal Data & Finance Buffs, as well as the American MSNBC Democrats, these communities trend somewhat older than the other, with participants more likely to be in their thirties of forties than twenties. In each case, we see these older groups spread emphasis more evenly across each incentive, whereas the interest of the younger groups tends to cluster around more immediate returns like points and rewards.



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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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