

# Customer Understanding

A study from the Water Matters community  
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### 1 Executive summary

When it comes to investment customers expect large companies such as Scottish Water to be doing this continuously to improve systems and keep things up-to-date. Customers do not need to be made aware of investments carried out by Scottish Water, however the information needs to be available if they choose to read up on it.

Overall, customers have a more negative view of a private company versus a public company though believe they get a much better service from private companies. Interestingly, customers have a less negative view of Scottish Water in comparison to how they perceive public companies in general, though would welcome a more personal service from public companies similar to what they receive from private companies.

Customers identify the elderly and disabled as the most vulnerable types of customers and suggest that a register of these customers should be updated by a wide audience and available on many platforms to ensure its application is widespread.

### 2 Overview of the study

#### 2.1 Objectives

Scottish Water is interested in understanding customer's thoughts and opinions on a number of different areas of interest including investment, perceptions of different types of companies as well as the best way to communicate with vulnerable customers.

Scottish Water is therefore looking to obtain customer opinion and feedback on these specific areas to ensure that this is taken into account when sharing information and communicating with their customers.

#### 2.2 Sample & method

The report consists of feedback gathered in two different ways:

1. 9 members of the Water Matters community took part in a 60-minute live chat hosted and moderated by MindMover. Members were asked about:
  - Their views on investment – what it means to them and their thoughts on companies that invest
  - Private vs public companies – how they view them and their preference when engaging/interacting with each
  - Vulnerable customers – how they identify a vulnerable customer and how Scottish Water can best communicate with them

Prior to the group, respondents were sent a pack about inclusive growth (via email) to familiarise themselves with the topic before taking part in the project.

2. Previous questions posted on the open forum on Water Matters, asking all community members:
  - Whether it they think it is important for Scottish Water to invest
  - Where Scottish Water should be looking to invest

## Customer Understanding

- Whether large companies like Scottish Water have a duty to look after their communities through investing?

Throughout the report, topic related poll results from Water Matters have also been included.

### 3 Investment

Customers were first asked to share their understanding of the term 'investment' when used by an organisation, given the following as an example, 'XX company is investing in XX community.'

Initially some customers were quick to respond and assume an investment like this is monetary, while there were a small number of customers that understood this to be monetary but also an investment of other things, such as time and resource.

*"Putting capital into a scheme of improvement"*

*"Putting in a large amount of money to pay for a project in order to reap profit"*

*"It makes me think they are trying to improve by providing time/money for a project"*

However, an investment for some customers is developing and investing for a more profitable output.

*"It sounds to me like physical improvements will be made, like a new building, creating x number of jobs"*

Though overall, the majority of customers understood the term investment to represent a monetary outlay that has the potential of providing a benefit.

*It is just the first thing that comes in my head when I think investment, it's all about monetary profit"*

*"Something which might end up giving you some benefits"*

*"Mostly but it could mean time rather than money, etc.,"*

*"Mostly its related to finance"*

When customers were asked what else could constitute an investment outside of monetary related investments, customers did understand this to be about time and effort, though time and effort could also be for the long-term good of a monetary gain.

*"The time and effort though is always for a reason and that is profit"*

In regards to an organisation investing, customers perceive this as a good thing as it has the potential to help people by providing jobs and sometimes a service. It can create a positive perception of a company if they are seen to be investing for the better.

*"I think it's a good thing, and can create jobs in the short term - it doesn't always in the long term though!"*

*"It makes me think a little better of them usually. it shows they care about more than profit."*

*"Positive if it helps the average person"*

*"depends if it is worthwhile or not... Has to have a defined use and not just job creation, must be sustainable"*

Customers on the Water Matters open forum felt that it was important for large companies to invest in new technology, maintain current infrastructure and look at ways to evolve and develop.

*"All companies should invest in things so to keep abreast of any possible threats."*

## Customer Understanding

*"I think all large companies should be investing in things to meet new technologies or circumstances or to deal with possible threats to service and to maintain infrastructure."*

Most customers were unaware of any investments currently being undertaken by Scottish Water.

*"Nothing comes to mind"*

*"No"*

While one customer mentioned works currently being undertaken by Scottish Water, they weren't aware of the reason behind the work but only focussed on the detrimental effect on their journey.

*"They are investing in the big works on the South Side of Glasgow - I'm not sure of the detail but I know it is causing traffic issues!"*

Customers understand Scottish Water investments to be focused around upgrading current infrastructure such as pipes and drainage as well as sewage plants.

*"I think SW investing is about upgrading pipes, drainage and the like"*

*"Better water and sewerage"*

When asked why they think Scottish Water would be investing in particular area, customers felt that this could be due to the expansion and development of a particular town which would then mean that improvements in infrastructure were needed to deal with this expansion.

*"I would think it would be to improve an area if, for example, new houses were built etc."*

*"Needed when population increases"*

For customers, it is important to see that Scottish Water is seen as proactive rather than reactive when investing.

*"I think it is important for Scottish Water to invest. Investing means that you are being proactive rather than reactive, which I personally think is important when it comes to water and sewage."*

When customers were prompted with potential types of investments: ageing services (i.e. the quality of water), correcting an existing problem (i.e. flooding) or replacing old infrastructure that might be getting towards the end of its life cycle (might start failing) – these were all perceived to be types of investments they would expect from Scottish Water.

*"Yes I would consider them investment"*

*"It is bettering what is there"*

*"I think an investment is about all three"*

However, customers were not aware of any investments in their area.

*"I'm not aware of anything in my area"*

## Customer Understanding

Customers would be interested in knowing about any investments carried out by Scottish Water, especially if this had a specific impact on them; however it would be more of a nice to know rather than a need to know.

*"Yes it would be quite interesting to know what is going on if it was my area"*

*"Might be interesting to know, or have access to this info"*

*"If it is going to impact on me any way I would like to know - if it is to improve service, etc. or even just if there was going to be any disruption while work ongoing."*

*"Maybe like to know, but not essential"*

*"Mostly I would expect the professionals to get on with the job though"*

Customers would prefer that this information was available, should they want to look for it, and suggested including this on the Scottish Water website.

*"I think the information should be available, e.g. on SW website, but I don't think it's necessary to spend money advertising it"*

*"Nice to know, not important. As long as info on website it is OK, don't want a glossy document all about it"*

*"Good point if it's on their website that it sufficient"*

One customer pointed out that it would become quickly apparent if Scottish Water were to stop their investments, so this is clearly something that is ongoing and happening without customers being aware of.

*"I wonder if a lot of people just assume it is happening, and they aren't so interested in the details. If SW weren't investing, we would soon know!"*

However, customers are less interested in being made aware of investment levels – their main concern is the actual investment being undertaken, rather than the amount invested.

*"I'm not bothered about the figures... if the work is getting done, and it is going to improve service, etc. that's all that matters. I don't need to know how much is being invested, just that the work is being done"*

*"No, would bore me to death!"*

*"No just what it spent on"*

If Scottish Water were to share future investment details, customers would be interested in knowing what they are investing in, where this is happening and the reason behind the investment. They would also be interested in understanding whether it would affect them and in which ways.

*"Where, what was being done, why it was being done, how it would affect me"*

*"What they are doing, where and why."*

*"Why they are doing it, what is their main objective"*

## Customer Understanding

Apart from investigating investment information on the Scottish Water website, one customer suggested sharing the information in an infographic that could be included when they receive their council tax bill.

*"Maybe just a basic infographic, that shows how much invested, what improvements, areas covered, that sort of thing, could come out with the council tax bills"*

While a few other customers would welcome receiving email updates, though not all.

*"If I could sign up to emails for updates that would be fine."*

*"Yep to signing up for emails"*

*"Get enough from other companies, would rather look at website if I'm curious"*

Customers would find it useful to know how investments would benefit them as a customer.

*"If it benefits me as a customer then yes"*

*"It would be important to know how it would benefit me as a customer, yes"*

However hearing customers stories would not be a welcome initiative to help them understand how an investment in an area can benefit them.

*"Not really, I tend to find those sort of things quite 'cheesy' and a bit unbelievable to be honest... I'm not sure I would use it at all, I'd prefer big picture numbers about overall investment, rather than stories of individuals"*

*"No not really"*

*"No, sounds incredibly forced and simliar to those fake DWP stories about how people were grateful that their benefits were stopped"*

A few customers would like to understand how any investments would impact Scottish Water as an organisation, especially if it generated profit. Others would not be particularly interested in knowing this information.

*"Yes, especially if huge profits are made"*

*"No I am more interested in how it improves the services to the public, which is what SW remit should be"*

Customers perception of Scottish Water would not change if they knew investment work was being carried out. For them, any investment Scottish Water undertakes is purely the organisation doing their job well, so would have little/ no impact on their perception of the organisation.

*"Indifferent"*

*"That they are good at their job"*

*"Makes me feel like they're doing their job"*

*"It makes no difference really as that is what theyre supposed to do"*

As a result, this would also have little impact on their trust of Scottish Water.

## Customer Understanding

*"I'd trust them the same"*

Customers were then asked their thoughts on Scottish Water undertaking investment work during times of austerity and their perceptions of this. For them, any investment is good and in some cases necessary, despite whether in good or bad times.

*"Any investment is good, in either good or bad times"*

*"Work still needs to be done, and there are still funds available"*

*"I don't think austerity is relevant, we need to invest in our water systems, regardless. I certainly wouldn't see it in a bad light if SW were investing."*

*"If work has to be done then efforts need to be made to accommodate this"*

As such, this would not impact on their trust of Scottish Water as an organisation.

*"No, I remain indifferent"*



## Customer Understanding

In regards to the level of service between the two types of companies, while some customers felt that there was little differentiation between the two, most felt that private companies offered a better service overall.

*"I think the level of service can be similar."*

*"level of service is a bit better with private companies"*

*"Public service is awful, private is far better"*

*"Service is always better when its private"*

Customers understand that public companies have less money to spend but feel that they should get more from public companies due to their taxes paying for this, though this is not the case.

*"Should get more since we are paying taxes for it but don't get more at all"*

*"Expect same level of service from both but private companies can provide slightly better service than public"*

Customers would welcome a more personal service from public companies.

*"I think that the public company employees just don't seem to care about the service they give"*

*"More personal service from public"*

*"Personal experience"*

Customers don't believe they can always choose whether they shop/interact with private or public companies. Most would choose public if given the choice as it is perceived to be less expensive.

*"I don't think we have a lot of choice over interacting. I'd prefer a public service, but unfortunately I need to use Abellio for the train as is my only option!"*

*"it depends; in most cases you interact with state companies as you have no choice. Which is where the slack service comes in."*

*"Private are mostly costly as compare to public"*

*"I prefer a public service to a private one"*

Interestingly customers do not believe that signing up with public companies (i.e. to receive news updates) increases their engagement with the company.

*"No"*

Customers predominantly see utility providers, such as gas and electricity, as private companies.

*"They are predominantly private, and have horrendous customer service!"*

*"Mostly private"*

Though realise that Scottish Water is a public company.

*"SW is the only public one I use"*

## Customer Understanding

*"Public, I think"*

*"Think SW public but energy provider s all private (although some of their names might suggest otherwise)"*

With Scottish Water being a public company this has little/no impact on a customer's trust, though for a few customers an organisation that doesn't rely on profit does have a positive impact on their trust of that company.

*"No"*

*"Yes, I tend to have more trust when there aren't shareholders waiting to suck every penny out of a service"*

*"From the forums and engagement that I've had I get the feeling there is a genuine interest"*

Customers would describe Scottish Water as more of friendly and warm in comparison to how they described a public company earlier in the group. Using words associated with a family man.

*"I think SW is still a reliable old man who gets on with things with no-one noticing"*

*"tweedy and middle aged, but with young children"*

*"More like a BFG"*

*"Younger, wears a suit, friendly"*

Customers interact with their gas and electricity suppliers only when they have to. They typically do this online or via the phone, specifically when submitting a reading.

*"As and when I need to"*

*"Phone usually"*

*"Online"*

*"I try not to. Submit readings monthly online and track usage via spreadsheet"*

Aside from Water Matters, customers rarely interact or engage with Scottish Water. They are only likely to do so when they have a problem.

*"I don't engage at all with SW outside the forum"*

*"I'm only really interested when I'm having an issue with my water"*

However, customers are not particularly interested in interacting with Scottish Water any more than they need to. They are only interested in interacting with Scottish Water to be informed about any impacts likely to have on them/their water supply.

*"Not really"*

*"I don't really engage with SW, however I would sign up to occasional emails regarding updates, etc."*

Customers are also less inclined to submit their readings and have a separate water bill, especially if it is likely to have an increase in costs.

## Customer Understanding

*“Never really think about it, and wouldn't want to if it involved extra cost”*

*“I'm happy with it being dealt with as it is through council tax”*

*“Makes no difference, seems to work well coming with the council tax bill, so as the saying goes, why fix it when it isn't broken”*

For Scottish Water to engage more with customers, a few customers would like to see a better website with additional information and updates via email. While others are happy with the current level of engagement:

*“To engage more, I would go back to the updates via email”*

*“Work on the website and make it more informative”*

*“Just information about when any service issues will be resolved”*

*“On website, twitter and Facebook. Just don't expect me to sign up for updates.”*

## 5 Vulnerable customers

Customers were initially asked what or who they saw as a vulnerable customer. To customers, vulnerable customers are those registered as disabled or the elderly, with some suggesting single parents.

*“An elderly person, or a disabled person”*

*“An elderly, disabled person, or a single mum”*

Customers would identify those who would be most affected if their water supply was disrupted as the most vulnerable, particularly the disabled or the elderly.

*“Elderly/disabled”*

*“Who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation”*

During times of disruptions, customers think that Scottish Water should ensure vulnerable customers have water, keep them updated on service disruptions and aim to keep them a priority during these times.

*“Keep them well informed”*

*“Get water to people who cannot access it themselves”*

*“Fresh water and sanitary provisions”*

*“I'd want them to have help as a matter of urgency, whether directly from SW or from social work/council”*

Customers were then informed that Scottish Water hold an additional support register, though it's not really until something goes wrong that they hear from vulnerable customers with additional requirements. Customers felt that Scottish Water could proactively inform customers of the service and encourage them to sign up by working with social services, writing to them /providing information with their bills or ensuring a family member helps out.

*“Social services should do it. self-reporting leads to over reporting”*

*“If info is provided in annual council tax updates then it really needs to be presented in a way that is effective”*

*“That's what I mean - get family members to do it. If there isn't a family member, then referral by social work or similar would be needed”*

Customers felt that it was important that Scottish Water offered a number of different platforms for customers to register, including phone, letter, email and online.

*“You would need to offer the ability to register online, by post, and other ways”*

However, customers realise that each 'vulnerable' customer is different and therefore this register should either be kept up to date by the customer, social services or by a friend/relative.

*“Depends, everyone is different”*

## Customer Understanding

*"I think once someone is on the register it should stay that way until SW are updated of the situation. To send letters, or call customers, would cost a lot. Maybe a letter once every 18 months or so, if no reply is given the person could be removed from the register?"*

*"That's why family members or social work should be helping people sign up/keep registered etc."*

## 6 Summary and recommendations

### Investment

- **For customers, when the term investment is used, it generally means money is going into something to produce profit/more money at the end.**
  - Investment can be perceived in a non-monetary way, though ultimately it is driven by improving something to generate profit.
  - If Scottish Water is 'investing' then ensure that customers know what and why they're investing and how this will benefit them as a customer in the long term.
- **Customers realise the importance of large companies to invest, including Scottish Water, and see this as a way for organisations to keep up with the times and invest in the future.**
  - Customers are not interested in being made aware of all investments carried out by Scottish Water. Instead they would rather the information was available for them to find if they were interested in doing so.
  - Ensure there is information on the Scottish Water website for customers to find out what investments are happening.
  - Try to avoid using customer stories when showing the impact of investments. Customers find these forced and un-relatable.

### Private vs. Public

- **Customers perceive private companies to be driven by profit and therefore had a more negative view of these companies when describing them. Despite the negative view of a private company, they were seen to offer a better service due to wanting/needing customer's business.**
  - Customers would welcome a more personal service from public companies.
  - Ensure Scottish Water offers a personal service when interacting with customers.
- **Customers had differing views of public companies. While some saw them as profit driven, others saw them as more reliable and friendly.**
  - Interestingly, customers perceive Scottish Water more positively than how they typically perceive a public company.
- **Currently, customers are happy with the level of interaction they have with Scottish Water.**
  - Though some customers, who are interested in further information, would welcome a better website and also email updates.

### Vulnerable Customers

- **Customers identify the elderly and disabled people as vulnerable customers.**
  - Ensure these customers are treated as a priority.
- **When it comes to updating details of the register Scottish Water has of their vulnerable customers, customers realise that each vulnerable customer is different and therefore many options need to be made available.**
  - Consider multiple platforms for customers to update details.
  - Ensure this is available for other people, aside from the customer, to update the information – including social services and family members.



Contact information

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