

# Consumer Council for Water

## Understanding drought and resilience



Prepared for Consumer Council for Water  
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# Contents

1. Objectives and methodology
2. How is drought perceived?
3. Customer attitudes towards drought
4. Restrictions and acceptability
5. How should drought be communicated?
6. SME's perspective on drought
7. Conclusions
8. Appendix



# 1. Objectives and methodology



# Research objectives

## Research background

YouGov was commissioned by the Consumer Council for Water to explore issues around drought management and resilience amongst water customers.

### **The research objectives were as follows:**

Understanding customer attitudes and perceptions of drought through;

- Understanding degrees of risk acceptability and tolerance
- Perceptions of industry planning and reactions to drought
- Prioritisation of restrictions and planning for drought
- Understanding the consequences and impact of restrictions on everyday life and businesses
- Language and terminology
- Communicating about restrictions

Fieldwork was undertaken in four stages, between Monday 21<sup>st</sup> January and Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March.



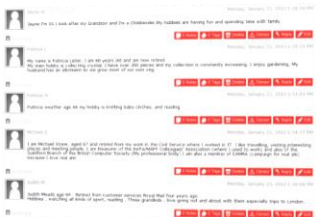
## **Stage 1 – Online forum**

Week-long forum with 20 customers from a range of areas in which restrictions were imposed during summer 2012. Mix of age, gender and social grade.



## **Stage 2 – Face-to-face focus groups**

Focus groups conducted with 8 respondents living in locations affected by the summer 2012 restrictions. Central London (29<sup>th</sup> Jan), St Albans (4<sup>th</sup> Feb), Oxford (5<sup>th</sup> Feb), Maidstone (11<sup>th</sup> Feb) and Worthing (12<sup>th</sup> Feb).



## **Stage 3 – Online forum**

A week-long forum with 20 customers from across the country, living in areas **not** affected by the summer 2012 restrictions. Mix of age, gender and social grade.



## **Stage 4 – In depth interviews**

Face to face and telephone depths with small businesses in areas affected by the 2012 drought restrictions. Respondents were business owners and sole traders in industries reliant on water services, including garden centres, window cleaning services and hot tub manufacturers.





## 2. How is drought perceived?



# We identified three groups of water customer defined by their attitudes towards drought and water services

**High engagement with water issues**

**Socially-conscientious customers** think of water as a natural and public resource and are engaged in wider issues of water conservation.



**Service motivated customers** view water as a service provided by their water company which they pay for.



**Water is a public resource**

**Water is a service**



**Unengaged urban customers** are low water users, using water for the essentials only. They are less engaged with water issues as they do not feel it has an impact on their lives.

**Low engagement with water issues**

# Across these groups, drought is commonly associated with a number of themes and feelings

Africa



De-sensitised

Ambivalent

Hosepipe ban



Drought

Water  
Management



Confused

Frustrated

Environment



Suspicious

'A joke'



# 'Drought' is associated with arid climates and seen as too extreme to describe experiences in the UK



Customers tend to initially associate the word drought with other countries such as the Sudan and Australia, rather than the UK.

- Linked to famine and arid climates, drought is seen as a serious issue affecting areas of the developing world.
- These perceptions of drought mean that the word is seen as **too extreme** to describe experiences in the UK.
- As a result, 'drought' can fail to resonate or provoke suspicion among customers.
  - Many customers do not think they have personally experienced drought in the UK as the word does not relate to personal experiences.
  - This leads to customers treating drought in the UK as 'a joke'
  - With some being suspicious of water companies motivations in using this word
- 'Water shortage' or 'low water levels' are deemed more appropriate for describing customers' experiences of drought in the UK.

'Famine in some countries. Don't really associate any serious implications of drought with the UK.' *Callum*

'Africa, desert, sand.'  
*Jon*

'People get angry at the word drought – it is over killed.'

# In the UK, drought is synonymous with the hosepipe ban



The hosepipe ban forms the basis of how customers relate to drought in the UK - it is the nationwide symbol of drought.

- Most see the UK as experiencing drought conditions **only if** there is a hosepipe ban in place.

'It goes hand in hand with hosepipe bans.'



The ban is the aspect of drought that customers are most likely to have personally experienced

- Some recall having the ban in place the last year.
- Customers are aware of fines but social pressure is often more influential (particularly among socially-conscientious)
- Though there is still confusion over the ban
  - Seen as a 'joke' that can people are able to still fill buckets with a hosepipe.
  - Leads to confusion and suspicion among customers as they do not see the rationale behind restricting hosepipe use rather than other types of water use.
- Those who do not use hosepipe in day-to-day life find it difficult to relate to drought for this reason.
  - Many do not use hosepipe in day-to-day life (i.e. unengaged urbans)
  - So association of drought with hosepipe fails to resonate

'It only starts seeming like drought when we are told there is not enough water in the reservoirs and underground, so will have to have a hosepipe ban.'



# With media coverage of drought reinforcing this connection



- **Media coverage of the hosepipe ban is how most customers hear about drought**
  - Customers are well accustomed to media coverage of the hosepipe ban, which focuses on the **restrictions** that may be put in place.
  - Many left with the impression that drought is purely a case of restrictions on their own freedom of use.
- **This media coverage can impact on customers' perceptions of how frequently drought occurs**
  - Many customers feel that drought bans are in place **every 1-2 years** due to coverage on the 'threat' of hosepipe ban.
- **As a result of frequent media coverage, customers have become desensitized to the issue of drought.**
  - Media accused of scaremongering with 'worst case scenarios'.
  - Tone of voice in media coverage reinforces view that drought is not a serious issue – with 'nanny state' attitude often voiced in the media.
  - This tone can frame the debate for customers around restrictions to their own freedom of use rather than the environmental impact. Water companies themselves are not seen to be present in this debate.

'You hear the media messages and you think here we go again'

'We were kept informed in the media and the restrictions were national news. ' *Business*

# Though for some, there are wider issues which shape perceptions of drought



**Some customers' perceptions of drought are shaped by their political standpoint and understanding of the water industry in the UK, with drought raising concerns over the industry and the environment.**

'Our overall drought problems are really as a result of not having a National Grid for water supply.'



For service-motivated customers, drought is perceived in the light of wider issues of water management. These customers often have a defined standpoint on the water industry and cite the privatization of water companies, leaks and management failures as causes of drought.



Among socially-conscientious customers, personal experiences of seeing dried up river-beds, dead plants etc. really make the issue of drought hit home. Drought is seen in the light of environmental issues such as climate change.

'Dying plants and lack of growth; parched lawns; fewer birds, insects and wild animals.'



# As it stands, water companies are failing to lead on the issue of drought

## Africa

Water companies use of the word 'drought' to describe situation in the UK fails to resonate with customers.

**Low water levels or water shortage more suitable terminology for drought**



## Water Management

Customers are unaware of what water companies are doing to alleviate drought leading some (particularly service motivated customers) to attribute drought to water company mismanagement.

**Water companies need to communicate the steps they are taking to reduce drought**



## Hosepipe ban

Drought has been narrowed down to the simplistic notion of 'drought = hosepipe ban' which is prevalent in media coverage .

**Water companies need to communicate the wider impact of drought aside from the hosepipe ban**



## Environment

The environment is a key concern for some customers, who liken the issue of drought to other environmental issues such as recycling.

**Drought needs to be communicated as an environmental issue to aid behavioural change among customers.**





# Planning for droughts is mid-level in terms of what customers think water companies should prioritise





### **3. Customer attitudes towards drought**



# The socially-conscientious customer believes drought is everyone's responsibility



## Who is the 'socially-conscientious' customer?

- Tends to be older and living in a rural area
- Memories of the '76 drought inform attitude – remembers standpipes in the street and British spirit of being 'in it together.'
- Water plays a big role in daily life – both basic essentials and for gardening, cleaning car, patio etc.
- Already makes an effort to reduce water usage through water butts, using grey water.
- Wants to have a voice and play a role in key issues they feel strongly about

'The British public do not value water enough and take it for granted. This public indifference and nonchalance contributes to droughts.'

## What are the implications?

- Their high usage of water for gardening/car washing means that drought would impact on daily life, with the hosepipe ban being an issue that **does** resonate with this group to some extent.
- Collective memories of '76 and a sense of public responsibility inform belief that customers as well as the water company need to step up to the challenge in times of drought.
- Therefore looking for more communication from water company on how to cut down on water usage in daily life i.e. practical tips and advice.

# The unengaged urbanite wonders how drought impacts on their life



## Who is the 'unengaged urbanite'?

- Living in city or suburban area.
- Use water for the basic essentials but rarely for non-essential purposes – they do not own a garden or car.
- Has little involvement with water company and few issues with water provision in general.
- But **are** somewhat interested in the wider environmental implications of drought.

'Not seen much [on drought] to be fair, just a news article stating the problem.'

'It should be more orientated towards conservation and 'what if?' scenarios when we are running low on water.'

## What are the implications?

- As a result of low water usage and common drought associations with the hosepipe ban (which they do not use), drought fails to resonate with this group. It's seen as an issue that affects others.
- Feel removed from drought issues and do not know how to change routine to improve a drought situation.
- Therefore less likely to read communications from water company on drought – it's not seen as relevant.
- But engagement with current environmental issues such as climate change/recycling means these customers do appreciate drought as a wider environmental issue - they just want to know how it impacts on their lives.

# The service-motivated customer sees drought in terms of the impact on their bill



## Who is the 'service-motivated' customer?

- Use water for both essential and non-essential uses i.e. sprinklers, filling up paddling pools.
- Has a 'customer focused' relationship with their water company.
- See themselves as paying for a service from water company.
- Often has a defined standpoint on water company management and feels a national grid is needed.
- Angered by leaks as these are seen as a waste of their money.

'Grossly over-priced for what is essentially a natural resource and basic human need in a country with bountiful amounts of rainfall.'

'It's frustrating because you're still paying the same money even when you can't use it.'

## What are the implications?

- Most likely to find drought restrictions a source of frustration and anger – they see themselves as paying for a service and therefore when that service is restricted, ask 'what am I paying for?'
- The primary responsibilities lie squarely with the water company and, to a lesser extent, the government.
- However, still open to some restrictions on their water provision – providing they know what water companies are doing to resolve these issues and are taking a 'pro-active' approach.



# Each type of water customer has a different attitude towards drought

## Socially-conscientious



### We all need to play our part in times of drought

- Engaged with environmental issues and actively looking for ways to reduce water usage
- See drought as an issue of social responsibility – everyone has a part to play in reducing the impact and likelihood of drought.

## Unengaged urbanite



### What has drought got to do with me?

- Aware of drought issues but struggle to see impact of drought in daily life as do not have car or garden.
- As a result, feel removed and ambivalent towards drought issues – does not see how involves them.

## Service motivated



### Drought is the water company's responsibility

- Focused on the water bill and service provision – water companies are paid to provide water at all times.
- Drought is an issue of water company mismanagement – leaks, lack of interaction between water companies etc.. is responsible for drought.

# Having a water meter can impact the wider view customers have of their water service...

**During the recruitment process for the forum respondents were asked whether or not they had a meter. Having a meter installed did not seem to significantly impact how these customers viewed drought management but did impact how some saw wider water services.**

- Many of those with water meters saw them as a good way of reducing the amount of water people use.
  - Therefore they emerge as part of the wider approach to conserving water, and part of the prevention of drought if not the main solution.
- The over-riding benefit of a water meter for most is a financial one rather than a resource management benefit.
  - No one on the forum complained that it had resulted in higher water bills.
- Many of those that had meters did not bring it up on the forum when giving their responses.
  - It did not shape the way in which everyone viewed their water service
- No customer linked water restrictions with lower bills. They still viewed water restrictions as an inconvenience in service.

‘With regards to Water Meters - I think that they are key to ensuring that the public reduces their use of water. If Everyone had to pay for each Litre of Water they consumed, usage would fall.’

‘contacted them when I received a large bill for the first time after I was widowed. they agreed the amount was still reflecting when there were four of us in the house. suggested a meter which I had installed...bills much lower now’

# Those who had not experienced restrictions were slightly less engaged with drought issues initially

**Overall those who had not experienced drought restrictions still engaged with the idea of drought and restrictions in a similar way.**

- Awareness of the issue of drought was purely based upon media coverage with little in the way of personal experience.
- This meant that they felt less able to comment on the role of their water company but reflected similar views in terms of expectations of what their water company should be doing in a drought.
- The same typologies emerged in these areas as those that had experienced restrictions. Issues such as leaks and burst pipes were more top of mind concerns, with drought accepted as a wider issue.
- The lack of experience with drought did not prevent these customers from engaging with the wider debates though.

'I have not suffer in an area that has been affected by drought, but have seen other areas that are affected on TV or heard reports on the radio.'

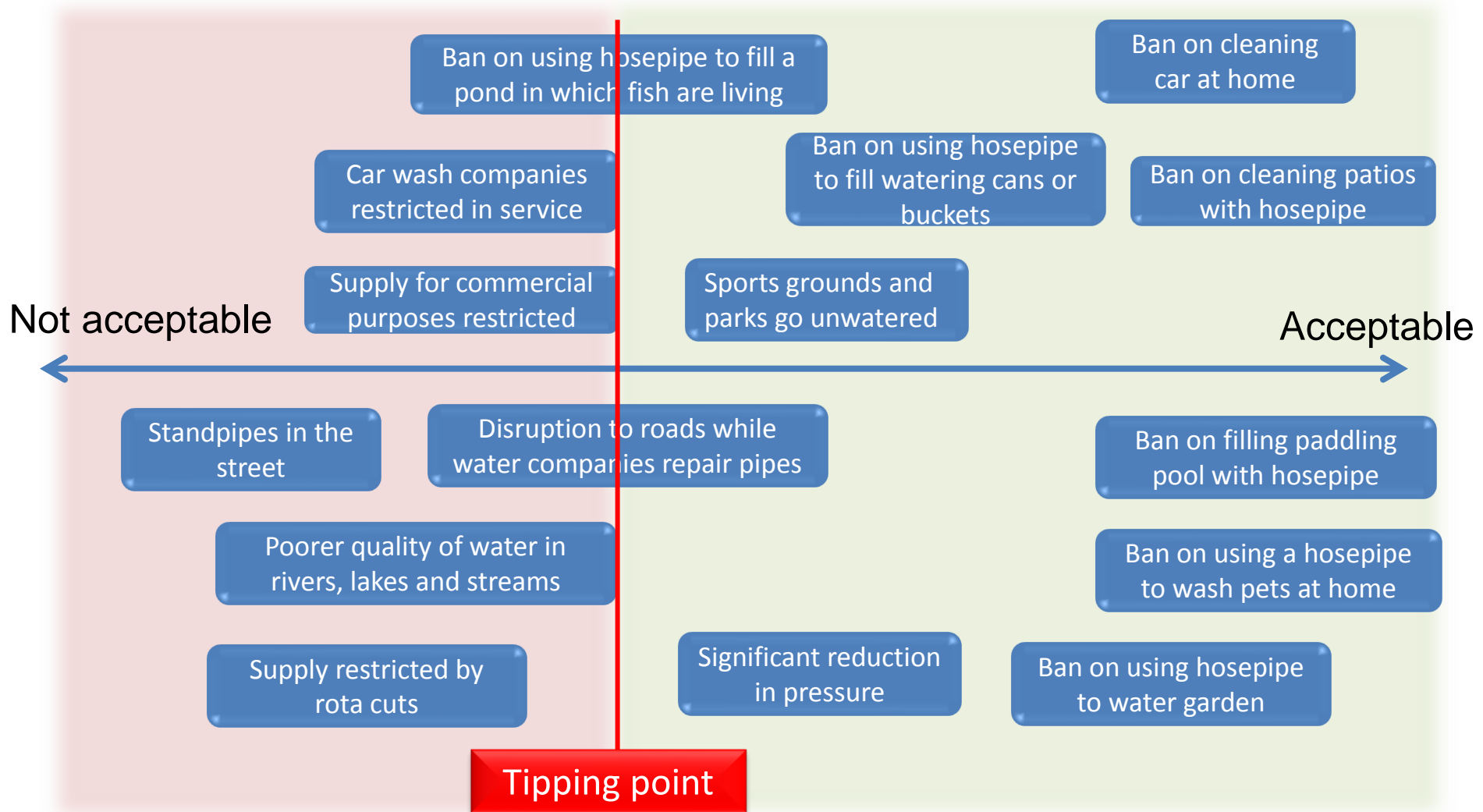
'I don't know, repairs locally or droughts nationally I suppose (would affect my supply)'



## 4. Restrictions and acceptability



Across customer groups, hosepipe restrictions are generally accepted. Customers identified the tipping point as when a drought requires severe restrictions or affects businesses and the environment.



Scale was determined using data collected from online forums and focus groups. Please see appendix for further details.



# There are some differences in the levels of acceptability across different customer groups



## **Socially-conscientious more willing to accept stand-pipes in the street than other customer groups**

- Previous experiences has given this group a higher resilience to extreme measures.
- Positive memories of '76 play into this. Even if they had not experienced this directly any vague memories of stand-pipes were associated with a strong community spirit.

'I did experience standpipes in the street. It was only for a day. Told to buy bottled water.' Jayne, 55



## **Of all groups, service-motivated customers are most angered by the thought of standpipes and restricted water supplies**

- These customers have least resilience to extreme measures on restrictions.

'Not acceptable as we are paying for it!'



## **Unengaged urbanites are most accepting of bans on using hosepipes and washing cars**

- This group would be least affected by these restrictions
- They therefore express few issues with imposing these restrictions during times of drought.

'It just wouldn't affect me'

# But overall, customers are willing to accept most restrictions if communicated in the right way

**Most customers felt that moderate restrictions are acceptable every few years. This is due to the lack of impact that many restrictions have on their daily lives – customers felt that alternative solutions are available.**

- Customers anticipate a hosepipe ban as part of a drought and are willing to accept this.
  - Once every 5 years is generally considered acceptable
- Few feel that the hosepipe ban would severely impact on their day-to-day life, it is more an inconvenience.
- Negativity is often focused around aspects of the ban that customers do not understand (i.e. why you can fill buckets but not use a hosepipe) rather than the ban itself.
  - Negativity focused on communication issues rather than actual restriction.

There is a broad consensus on the acceptability of less extreme drought restrictions during drought periods IF customers are aware of water companies reasoning behind the restrictions



## 5. How should drought be communicated?



# Customers do not always respond well to water company communications in times of drought

Low levels of customer engagement means that, in times of drought, water company communications can be seen as accusatory and one-sided.

- Customers feel that water companies only communicate on drought when they want customers to make changes themselves.
- This can breed resentment towards water companies
- Though some did like the clear, direct messaging

‘They still strike me as giving the excuse as to why its my problem that the companies can’t manage their business.’



‘I think they are effective adverts for making you stop and think.’



# Though they do expect communication on drought to come from the water companies themselves

While customers generally have low levels of engagement with their water company, they do expect their water company to communicate with them during a drought.

- **Customers have a basic idea on the roles of the government and environment agency in managing drought.**
  - Environment agency attributed to monitoring, checking water levels and impact on wildlife.
  - Government seen as having a regulatory role – keeping water companies in check.
- **But water companies are seen to have the overall responsibility for managing and communicating on drought.**
  - When a drought is declared, customers see their water company as the key point of contact.
  - Feel they are more likely to **trust** messages from water companies as opposed to the media reports which can focus on hosepipes bans and personal freedom as outlined earlier.
- **The four stage drought plan makes sense to customers but is too much detail for most and so not the most helpful way of communicating**
  - Confusion over the 4 levels of drought – customers think Level 1 of the drought plan as more severe than it is – they find it difficult to think of a drought without restrictions in place.
  - There is value in communicating pre-drought shortages to shift the perception that drought is only an issue when restrictions are in place. Customers are surprised to learn that an area can be in drought without restrictions.



# Communication on drought should meet the needs of the three different customer groups

## Socially conscientious

Drought is an environmental issue

So I want practical tips to save water in my day-to-day life

- Wants water companies to provide **practical tips** and advice on saving water.
- Looking to use these communications to change behaviour on a day-to-day basis, **not just in times of drought.**
- Most open to educational information on the causes of drought.

## Unengaged urban

Not sure about the causes of drought

I could feel compelled if I know the wider picture

- Communications with this group are difficult as they rarely feel compelled to read information from their water company.
- But, a combination of practical tips and advice and information on the wider environmental issues affecting drought would help.

## Service motivated

Drought is caused by water company mismanagement

So I want to know what the water company is doing first

- Looking for information on the steps their water company is making to resolve the drought.
- Want to know about **future investments to reduce drought and leaks.**
- Will then feel more inclined towards higher costs and taking steps to save water themselves.

# And should be on a long term basis, as well as during a drought period

**In the instance of a drought, water companies need to provide clear information on...**

- What restrictions are in place
- How serious the drought is
- What the water company is doing to resolve the immediate issues

**Outside of a drought period, water companies also need to provide information on...**

- Long-term resources on saving water to aid behavioural changes
  - Taking on an education role in wider water management
  - Similar to recycling campaigns i.e. educating children, practical tips and advice.
- Information on what they are doing to reduce the impact of drought and leaks in order to...
  - Enhance trust among customers through showing transparency in making customers understand the range of services they pay for.
  - Establish a two-way relationship with the customer.

'An indication of how serious the situation is and how much longer the drought is likely to continue'

'The need for everyone to preserve water at all times should be an on-going message whether there is a drought concern or not.'



'How are they ensuring that the huge amount of water this year that they have been given from the skies is available for the next couple of years?'



# A range of communication channels could be considered to increase the water company profile in the debate

**The ideal method of communication from a water company varied but some common themes emerged.**

- Communication direct from the water company should be through leaflets, letters or emails are seen as the most direct, reliable and professional way for water companies to reach every customer.
- Social Media did not emerge as an effective way for customers to stay in touch with their water company day to day as non one would follow their water company on Twitter.
- However in times of drought restrictions some felt that Twitter would be a good way of keeping people informed.
- A public face of the company would be positive for some. There was a feeling that if water company spokespeople were more visible on TV or radio they would feel that the company was more part of the debate.
- These spokespeople could increase a level of trust and make customers take restrictions more seriously. During the workshops participants appreciated having a water company representative to answer questions.

'I would like a flyer through the door explaining what the water company has used our money for in tackling drought'

The only guaranteed method would be by sending out material either as a leaflet [fine as a generalisation] or a booklet which could be more thorough. I don't want more unsolicited emails and I have yet to be seduced by social media.

# Some customers are willing to pay 5-10% extra for investment in this area



There is some willingness to pay 5 – 10% extra towards their water bills to ensure that water companies are able to make investments to reduce drought disruptions.

- **Some customers are open to the idea of pricing increases to support investment**
  - If they believe the pricing increases are justified.
  - Costs need to be transparent and communicated to customers
- **Addressing bursts and leaks is a key issue affecting willingness to pay**
  - Many think this should be prioritised first, above planning for drought.
  - Some ask why customers should pay extra when leaks/bursts already mean additional charges onto their bills.
- **There are calls for more financial incentives for saving water amongst customers**
  - Some think they should be given money off bills for using water wisely (i.e. socially-conscientious)
  - Customers with low water usage tend to support installing water meters.
  - While high water users i.e. those using hosepipes, sprinklers and swimming pools do not agree with water meters.

'I think 10% would be reasonable as long as the results were effective and communicated'

'If bills are to rise further, I think the companies should also be shouldering some of this responsibility - e.g.. much higher targets set for replacing leaks etc.'

# Those with less experience of drought are less open to paying extra for investments in this area



We found that those with little experience of drought were less open to increases in their water bill to cover water company investments to avoid water use restrictions in the future.

- In terms of the three customer profiles, reactions to a higher water bill to cover water company investments in drought were mixed. Across all profiles, some were open to paying extra and others were not (though service-motivated customers were the least likely to accept extra charges).
- Customers' views were shaped by their own personal circumstances as well as attitudes towards water companies and drought – e.g.. while socially contentious customers relate to the issue of drought, they may also not feel that they have the money to pay additional costs.
- However, there was more openness towards increases in water bills among those who had direct experience of drought restrictions. Recent experiences of drought restrictions and subsequent engagement in drought issues did provide some customers with more of an inclination towards higher charges.

'I would be very unhappy to see my water bill increase as we already pay over the odds for our water, we pay nearly £800 per year already' *Socially contentious*

'I am more than happy to see my bills increase if this reduces the incidents of water restrictions in the future because this surely reduces costs in the long term.'  
*Experienced drought*





## 6. SME's perspective on drought



# SMEs where water is an essential part of their service

## Builders



'Without water you can't lay concrete, you can't run heating systems.....without water we'd not be able to work' (Property maintenance).

## Building swimming pools



## Garden Centre's & professional gardeners

'I need good water pressure to install good quality showers' (Building company)



'Water is essential, if not my plants would die' (Gardening company)

# SMEs where water is an essential part of their service

*'We cant use grey water to clean cars...we have an image to keep up'  
(Valeting company)*



**Cleaners**

*'I use water all the time at work' (Cleaning company)*

**Car valeting**



*'We need water to clean the pets' (Pet grooming company)*

*'Knock on effect (of droughts)...less income, no new clients and hard to plan' (Gardening company)*

**Pet grooming**





# Most of the business respondents had not experienced significant *direct* impacts of water restrictions, as they continued a near normal water routine

'I still use the water as if not people would lose their jobs (Builder)



'No great affect....as we carried on using hose pipes' (Car valeting)

**Water is essential  
for business  
success**



'We still washed cars but couldn't use a pressure washer...made do with efficiency reduced slightly' (Car valeting)



'We had to use water...if not I'd be behind on payments to the bank...we used the water as we felt' (Builder of swimming pools)

# Some businesses experienced *indirect* impacts of water restrictions



**Demand for services increased when water restrictions were in place, for the car valeting companies and the garden centre.**

*‘We needed information to advise customers and we stocked up on water butts and downpipes’ (Garden Centre)*



**Demand for services decreased due to public’s concern over water use during a drought.**

*‘I get funny looks from the public when I use a hose pipe during a ban. Some customers are not happy....but I explain that it is for my business’ (Cleaning and maintenance company).*

*‘Some clients say I don’t want new plants this year as there will be a hose pipe ban...I don’t get any new clients during a drought’ (Gardening company).*



# Customers 'fear' of businesses using their water - a need to educate the public on water restrictions

- Three of the business respondents (cleaning and gardening companies) used the customer's water for their business needs. They experienced customers 'fear' of the business using their hosepipes etc.. during a drought. *'It is a grey area' (Gardener)*
- The business respondents felt that customers' 'fear' had led to less work opportunities.
- Businesses believe that water companies need to educate the public on how water restrictions affect businesses.

'Customers reactions are extreme- they are scared of being fined. They don't like me even using watering cans during a drought'



'Many customers don't want to plant more during a drought....huge and scary impacts on my business'

# A demand for business specific communication from the Water Companies as businesses are confused

'The Water Company should email businesses their rights.....so I can tell my customers' (Cleaner and maintenance)



'There should be bespoke information for businesses-communication is key' (Valeting company)

'They should have a regional representative who goes into businesses to discuss drought plans rather than sending lots of literature. Good to show the bigger picture-affects on crops etc.'



'They are not pro active enough and have not provided enough information on ways to save water e.g.. sourcing grey water' (Garden Centre).

# Behaviour change opportunities - where will communication be most effective?

## Three key behavioural groups emerged:



1. Those who seek/ read information on drought, are water conscious and believe that everyone is responsible for managing water use. **Most likely to reduce their business water use even without restrictions, during a drought**

2. Businesses who were worried about a negative impact of restrictions on their business **visited their water company's website to find out if restrictions affect them.** If restrictions are not placed on their business- they are unlikely to reduce their water use.

3. Businesses who were very worried about a negative impact of restrictions on their business **don't seek out information or follow water restrictions.** They do not change their water use as they fear it will lead to a loss of income.

From our sample, the garden centre & gardener represented this group. They had knowledge and interest in the environment.

From our small sample we could not identify a 'type' of business that fitted into 2 and 3, rather it was based on owners personalities.

**The highest behaviour change opportunities-  
socially- conscientious  
group**



**The lowest behaviour change opportunities-  
service motivated group**

# Acceptability of water restrictions on businesses



'I encourage my customers to have water butts. We use grey water to water the plants'

'Restrictions should be set early on the public to protect the businesses who need water'



**Water is a public resource. Socially-conscientious group**

**Water is a service. Service motivated group**

'Water is a vital service so It's ok to make some restrictions for the greater good & public health'

'We only used a hosepipe for 3 hours a day and no sprinklers during a drought' (Garden Centre)

'If there were water restrictions on businesses.....I would lose money and customers'

'Public and businesses should be treated differently- businesses should not have restrictions'

# Willingness to pay more to avoid restrictions?



'They could introduce a tariff for higher and lower [business] water users'

'I am not willing to pay more as I use my customers water'

**Would not be willing to pay more**

**Would be willing to pay more**

'Yes open to more flexibility in terms of pricing and higher tariffs...but I want to see more investment from water companies'.

'As a business I would pay more to not have any restrictions- 5% more'

'Tariff is high enough...There should be a rebate....greed of water company'

**Water is a service-  
restrictions are unacceptable**

**Water is a public resource-  
restrictions are acceptable**





## 7. Conclusions



# Conclusions (1)

- Customers are not widely engaged in the issue of drought and perceive it as something that rarely has impact on their lives.
- **Language and terminology:** Drought is considered too extreme to describe drought in the UK.
  - Low water levels or water shortage are more appropriate.
- **Perceptions of drought:** are dominated by associations with the hosepipe ban.
  - Customers find it difficult to think of drought without restrictions.
  - The wider impact and implications of drought are not clear to water customers.
  - Water companies are currently not clear enough about what actions they are taking to manage drought besides introducing restrictions.
- **Impact of drought:** Drought restrictions not seen to have a wide impact on customers
  - Customers feel that restrictions are either insignificant or have alternative solutions.
  - Drought does impact on businesses, where public fear of using water services often has greater impact on the business than actual restrictions.
- **Prioritisation and restrictions:** Customers accept moderate drought restrictions but identify the tipping point as when drought causes severe service disruptions i.e. rota cuts or impacts on the environment and businesses.
  - In terms of investment, drought is mid-level.
  - Addressing leaks is often seen as a more pressing investment.

# Conclusions (2)

- **Communication:** Communication on drought is needed to widen perceptions of drought, encourage behavioural changes and build customer trust.
  - Currently, customers feel there is a lack of communication from water companies around drought, particularly around how they manage water resources.
  - Information on long-term planning and the role of the water company is needed.
  - This should be combined with advice on water usage and detailed explanations for the rationale for restrictions and how they are applied.
  - This would establish a more transparent relationship with the water company and enhance customer trust, which then may encourage behavioural change.
- Communication should reflect the needs of the four customer groups identified in this research.
  - **Socially-conscientious customers** are looking for practical tips and advice on saving water during and outside of drought periods.
  - **Service motivated customers** need to know what water companies are doing to resolve drought issues, both in the short-term and long-term.
  - **Disengaged urban customers** could be more engaged through information on the wider environmental issues affecting drought, and some practical tips on saving water.
  - **Business customers** are looking for more business specific communication to clarify the 'grey areas' and information to educate customers on business restrictions.

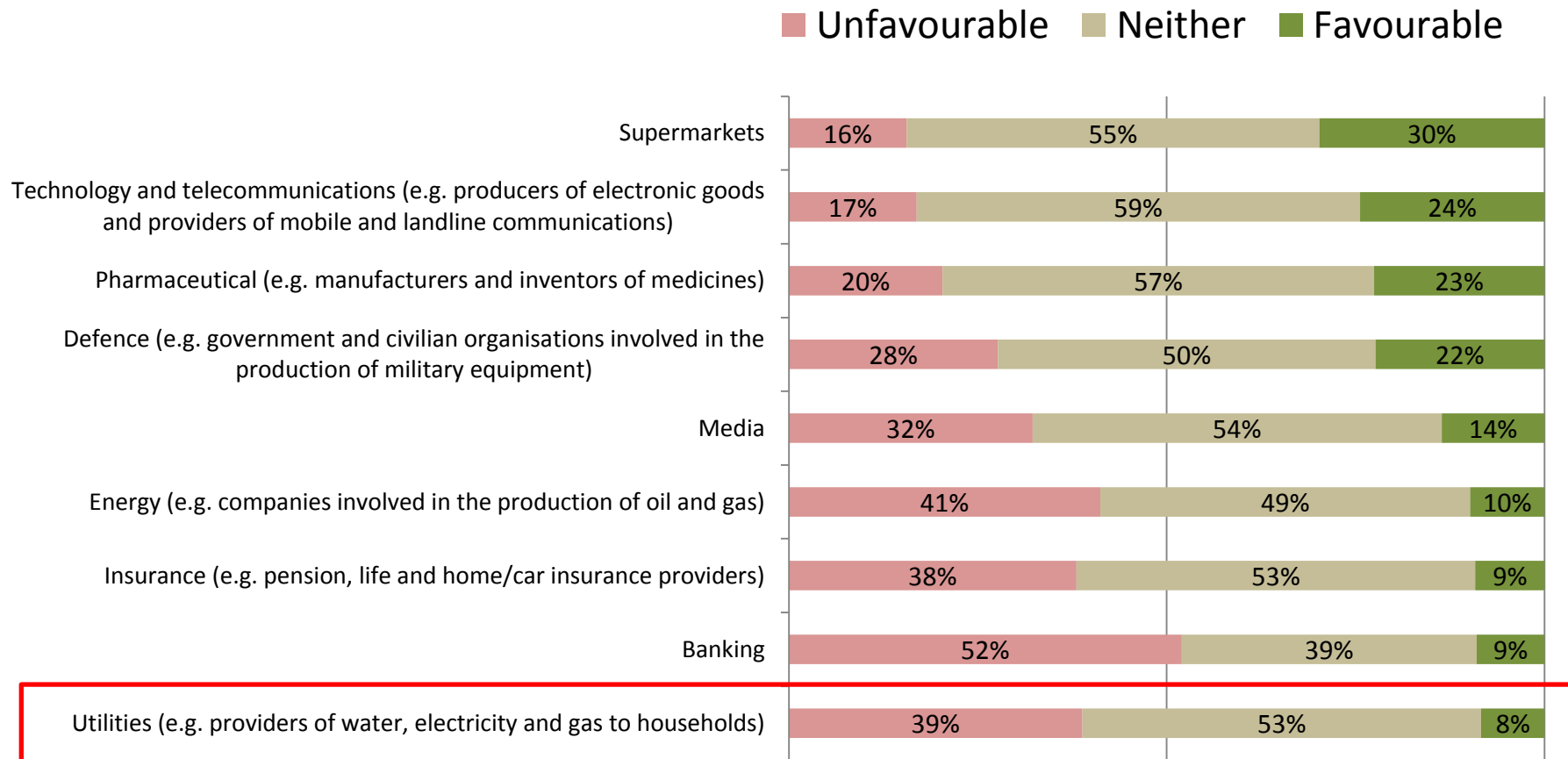


## 8. Appendix



# Communication on drought must be seen in the context of lower levels of customer favorability towards the utilities industry

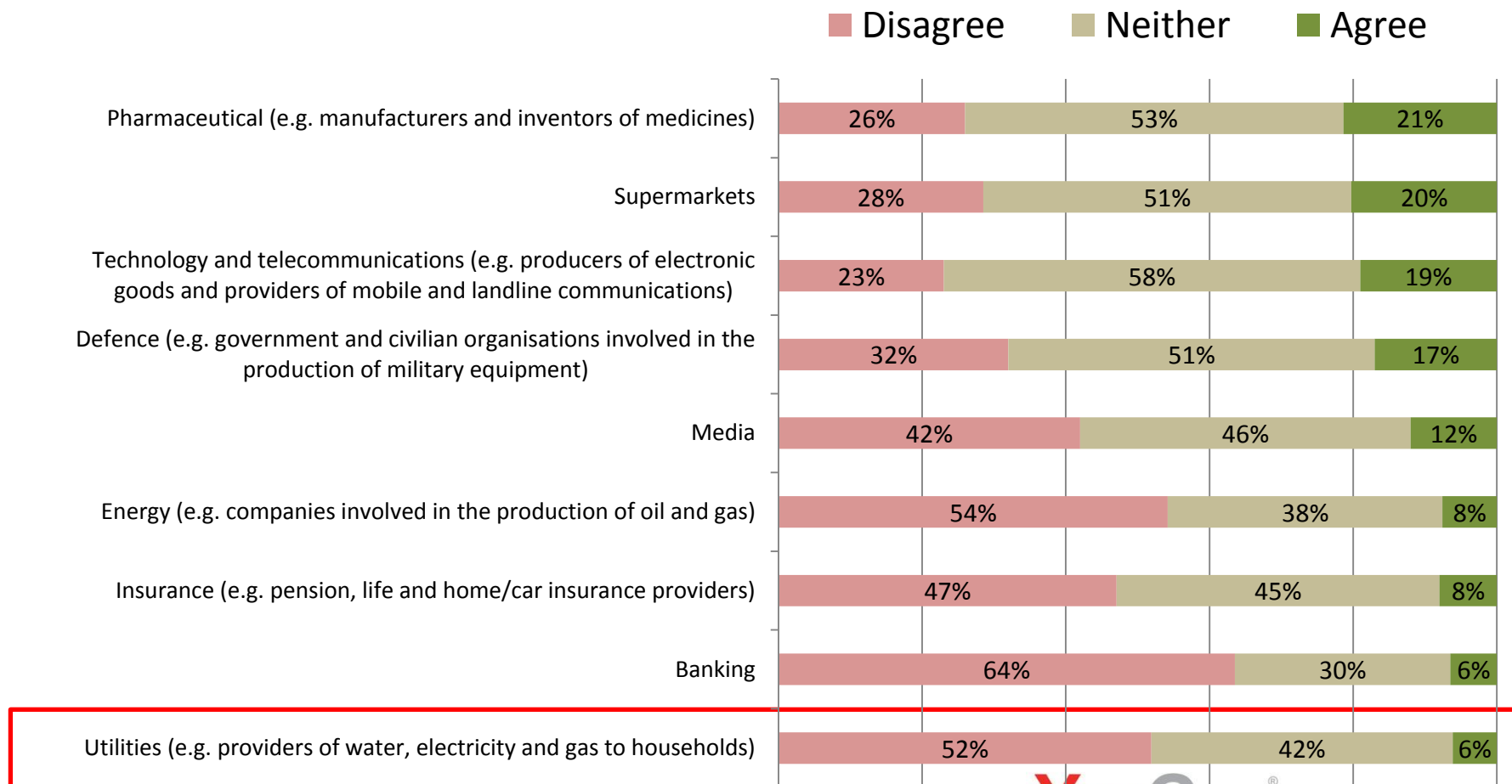
**In terms of favourability towards the utilities industry, 53% are ambivalent towards the industry while 39% feel unfavourable towards the industry.**



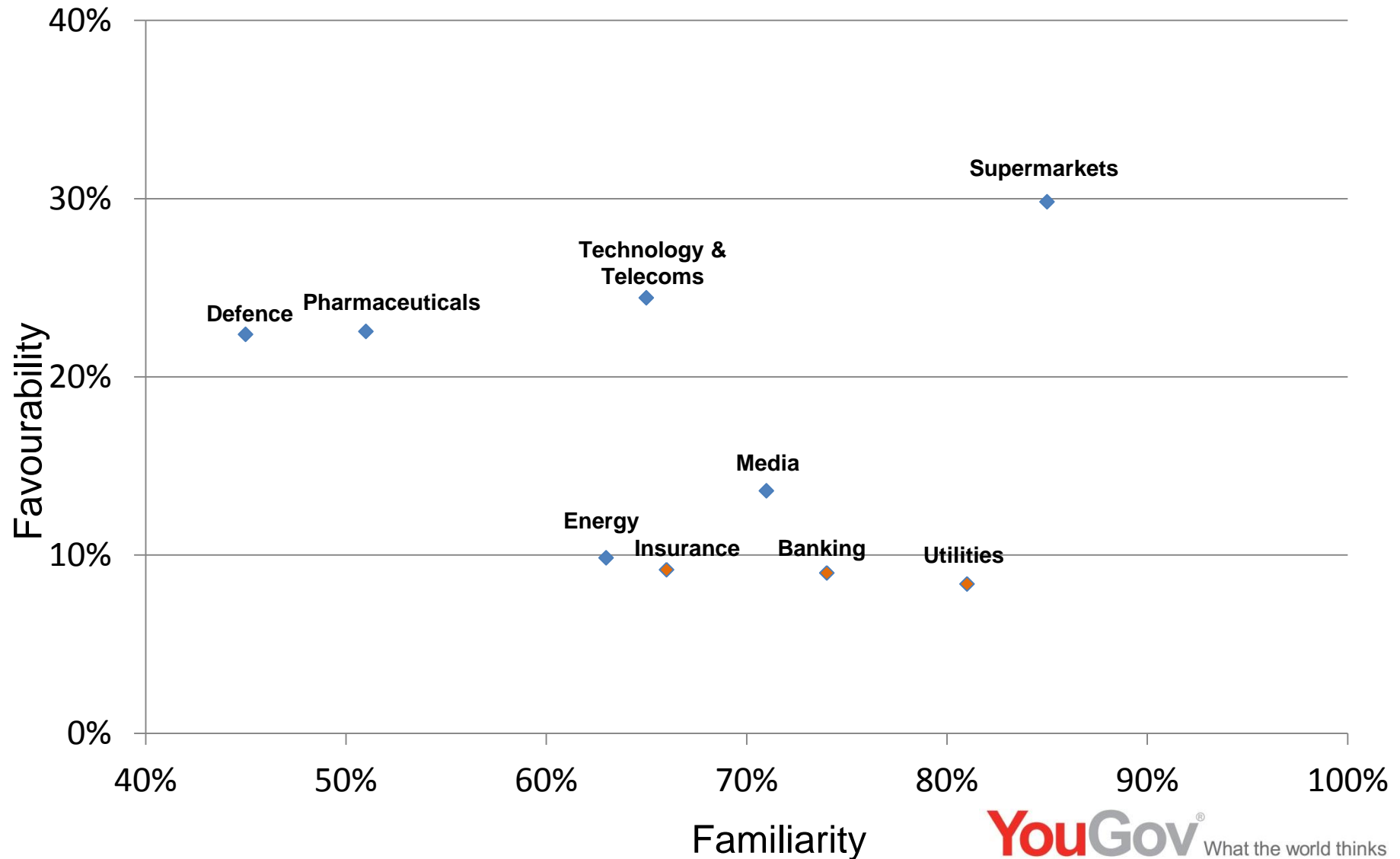


# And low levels of trust in the utility industry's commitment to the best interests of the customer and wider society

**52% said they disagree that they trust the utilities industry to focus on the best interests of its customers and wider society.**



# Familiarity vs Favourability - Industry comparison from YouGov February 2013 survey



# Methodology for acceptability scale

The acceptability scale was determined using data collected from both the online forums and focus groups.

- Respondents were asked to place attributes on a scale of most to least acceptable.
- YouGov analysed these responses and further discussions on attributes to determine an average across groups.

