

Parcel Delivery Complaints on Social Media

UK consumers are among the biggest online shoppers in Europe, with 51% saying they prefer to shop online than in store.¹ 2 billion parcels are delivered to UK homes each year, an increase of 50% since 2010.²

The majority of these deliveries are successful, arriving securely and on time. However, our research from 2017 also found that as many as 6 in 10 consumers had experienced a problem with parcel delivery in the past year.³

These issues include items being late, being left in unsafe places, or receiving an incorrect delivery attempt confirmation despite being home at the time of delivery. They range from the mildly inconvenient, up to the intensely frustrating.

To voice these frustrations, and get a quick response, consumers are turning to Twitter. Twitter is popular because it's quick, easy, and public. It's also not always easy to find out how to make a complaint through other channels, and Twitter may be used as a last resort.⁴

As a result, hundreds of thousands of issues are raised with parcel carrier on Twitter each year. Having begun to analyse this data, **we're now calling on parcel carriers to publish their complaints data.** This will strengthen our monitoring of this growing sector, and help to ensure that best practice is identified and can be disseminated to other carrier.

Previous research found that **3 in 5** people took no action after experiencing a problem with parcel delivery

2 in 5 people felt more worried or anxious as a result of the problem



Our role as consumer watchdog:

Citizens Advice is the official consumer watchdog for the postal sector. Our role is to ensure postal services and post offices meet the needs of consumers in a way that is fair and accessible for all, with particular regard for vulnerable consumers.

If you've had an issue with sending or receiving post that you need help to resolve call our consumer helpline on: 03454 04 05 06 or if you want to contact us about your local post office email: postofficechanges@citizensadvice.org.uk

Methodology

We use a tool called **Method 52**, that uses Natural Language Processing (NLP) to classify text into categories.⁵ This allows a researcher to analyse hundreds of thousands of Tweets, without having to manually code each one. The researcher codes a sample of Tweets, which ‘teaches’ Method 52 whether Tweets that contain certain words, in certain orders, belong in a given category.

We first use it to identify whether a Tweet is about a problem that the consumer has experienced. This working definition of a ‘complaint’ takes the word of the consumer at face value and is not limited solely to formal complaints acknowledged by the carrier. Method 52 identifies Tweets in this category with an accuracy of 80%. We then focus on these Tweets, and classify them further based on the type of issue present.



Spotlight on Christmas complaints

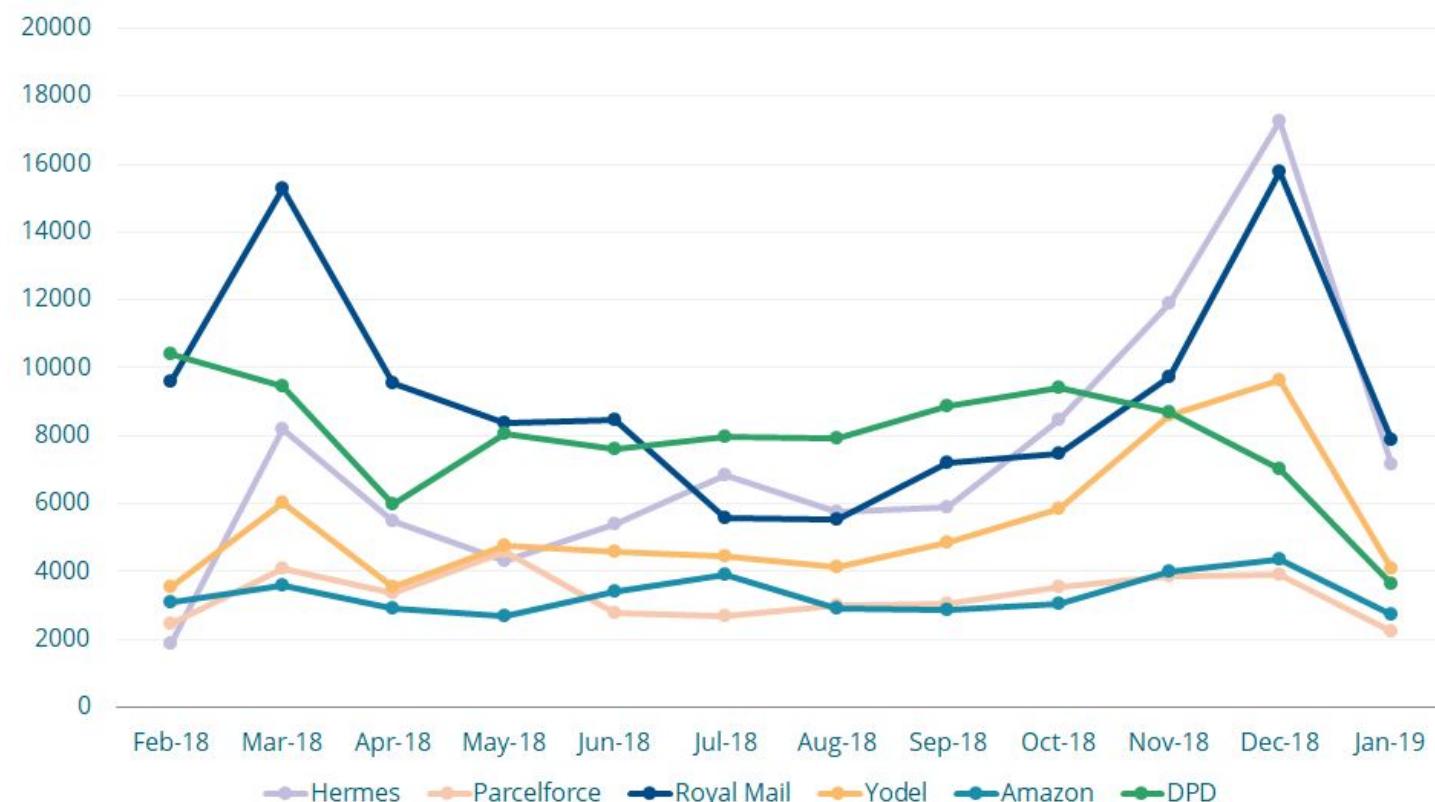
Each year the Christmas and Black Friday period sees a dramatic increase in the number of parcels delivered, and consequently the volumes of complaints raised on Twitter. Christmas 2018 was the worst year for retail trading since 2008,⁶ but Twitter complaints volumes were still around twice as high compared to the rest of the year.

The pressure is on at Christmas - both for carriers and consumers - to get gifts delivered in time. Any problems are likely to be more stressful than the rest of the year. Our previous research found that consumers spend an average of 2.5 hours resolving parcel problems at Christmas.⁷

In November 2018 DPD stopped handling complaints on Twitter, directing consumers to instead email them; the resulting drop in volumes is reflected in the chart to the left.

“I've waited 3 days for my order - it's meant to be next day. You said you've attempted delivery but i've been waiting in the house and you haven't! @Hermesparscels”

Monthly Twitter complaint volumes



* Royal Mail twitter volumes include those about letters and other Royal Mail services (eg. Redirections). As the Universal Service Provider they deliver 3x more parcels than their nearest competitor and were affected more significantly by 'Storm Emma' in March 2018

** Amazon figures include only those about parcel problems, but, not all of these will be delivered by Amazon Logistics

What are consumers complaining about on Twitter?

We use Method52 to categorise tweets based on what consumers are complaining about.

The two categories we've explored so far are **Customer Service**, and **Misdelivery**. Royal Mail are excluded from our analysis because not all of their Twitter activity relates to parcel issues.

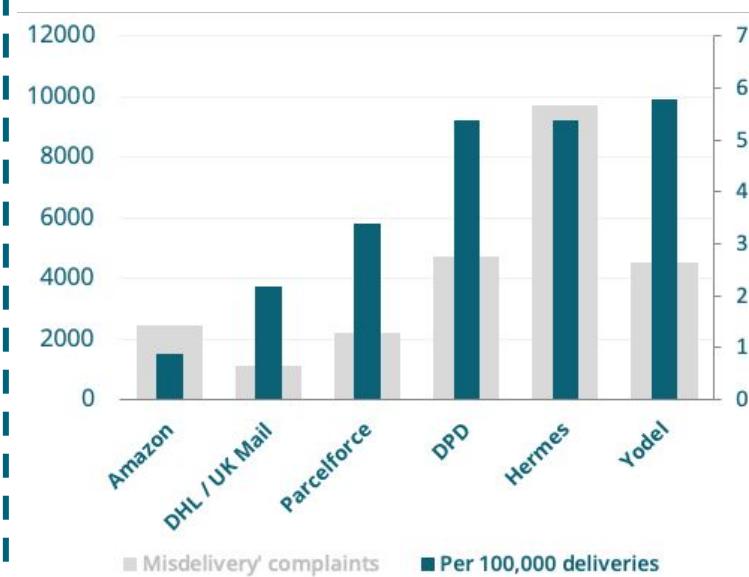
Twitter complaints reveal elements of consumer behaviour that are not as well recorded through other methods. For instance, when waiting at home for a delivery and receiving a 'sorry you were out card', consumers can easily take to Twitter to report the incident in real time. The same is true for issues with web chat or phone lines.

These graphs to the right show data for the 3 months from November to January.

Misdelivery

Approximately 1 in 4 Tweets stem from a misdelivery problem. This includes instances where someone receives a 'sorry you were out' card when they were at home, or a delivery confirmation notification with no sign of the parcel. It also includes items being left in insecure locations, or not where instructed.

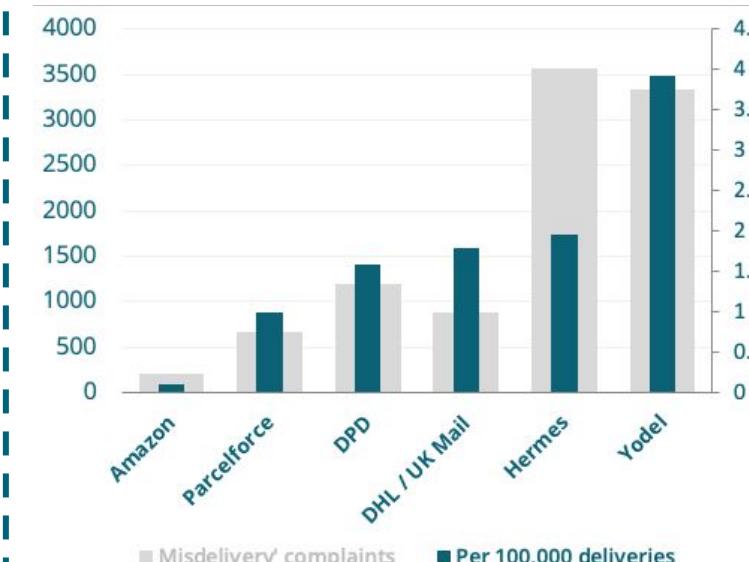
@YodelOnline is THE WORST delivery service ever. Why would you deliver to my neighbour when firstly I was in, and secondly the house # doesn't even exist on my road!?



Customer Service

Customer service issues are classified as when a consumer is having difficulty contacting the delivery company to get a resolution. Mostly this stems from a frustration with automated phone lines or web chat, or not being able to get a satisfactory answer once in contact.

@DPD_UK Please reply to the DM I've sent you. I've been trying to get in touch for ages now. All my emails are being ignored!!



*DHL and UK Mail combined because in October 2018 DHL bought UK Mail, and UK Mail's twitter page directs customers to the DHL page.

**Volume estimates from Citizens Advice / Apex Insight analysis

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Delivery companies are responsible for 85% of Twitter complaint volumes

How do parcel carriers compare?

To work out how parcel carriers compare to one another on Twitter, we use the ratio of negative or complaint Tweets compared to the total. This gives us an indication of performance that is not affected by volumes.

However, Twitter is just one channel among several, and the number of people complaining on Twitter is likely to have a lot to do with how well signposted the page is, and how, or to what extent different companies choose to route customers onto Twitter. As a result, different sources of data on parcel carriers performance offer conflicting assessments of their performance.

Some carriers who score highly with Money Saving Expert, or on Trustpilot, score poorly on Twitter; the opposite is also often true. Whilst some consistent patterns emerge, it is difficult to robustly compare carrier performance without access to a single, comparable source. **Parcel carriers should therefore publish standardised complaints data to enable a more robust comparison.** This would fill a significant gap in available data, and enable a comparison that is easy to interpret.

	% Tweets that are classified as a 'complaint'	Complaints raised on Twitter February 2018 to January 2019	Money Saving Expert rank	Which? Satisfaction score	Trustpilot rating (out of 10)
Carrier 1	80%	99,488	12	83%	8.3
Carrier 2	80%	39,506	6	84%	2.8
Carrier 3	79%	95,084	1	80%	4.1
Carrier 4	74%	6,531	13		5.6
Carrier 5	71%	95,084	17	80%	7.6
Carrier 6	69%	2,843	3	81%	0.7
Carrier 7	68%	13,370	10	88%	
Carrier 8	61%	125,728	2	84%	7.6
Carrier 9	59%	1,698	9		0.9
Carrier 10	57%	14,380	5	82%	7.5
Carrier 11	50%	7,642	7	82%	0.5

Conclusion and recommendations

Our analysis shows that hundreds of thousands of people complain to parcel delivery companies each year, having experienced a wide range of problems, and often having given up trying through other channels.

Consumer legislation states that it's the retailer's responsibility to ensure parcels are delivered successfully, and therefore consumers should complain to the retailer. However, consumers do not always do this; if the problem is with the delivery, then it often seems to make sense to complain to the carrier instead.

Consumer markets should always go with the grain of consumer behaviour. Consumers will continue to complain to the carrier, and should not be disadvantaged for doing so. Therefore it should be easy to find out who to contact, be that with the carrier, or retailer, and all enquiries should be dealt with quickly and to a high standard.

Royal Mail, as the Universal Service Provider, are required to publish an annual summary of complaint volumes and types, but no other carrier is required to do this, and the data itself is not granular enough for effective monitoring. **We are therefore calling on delivery companies to publish their complaints data to help us monitor complaints handling in this sector.** We will use it to ascertain a minimum acceptable standard for complaints handling, and to identify best practice. Carrier who excel at complaints handling should have this recognised, and have their insights shared with carriers who need to improve.

Future research will explore the consumer complaints journey in more depth. We hope to uncover the areas where processes should be improved, and identify examples of best practice for delivery companies to adhere to.

Footnotes

1. Emphathybroker.com, [New research reveals UK consumers now prefer to shop online rather than in store](#), July 2018.
2. Apex Insight, [UK Parcels Market Insight Report 2017](#), February 2017
3. Citizens Advice, [Parcel Delivery: Delivery services in the online shopping market](#), 2017
4. Ibid.
5. Demos, ["Social media is transforming how to study society"](#), 2014
6. Verve, [Transparency and Ease](#), 2017
7. [IMRG Metapack UK Delivery Index - January 2019](#).
8. Citizens Advice, [Consumer advice trends report](#), Q2 2016/17

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