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UK public EV charging apps

State of UX review 2023

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Contents

Introduction

As electric vehicles (EVs) continue to gain traction, the apps that allow drivers to make use of public charging networks are becoming increasingly important.

In fact, the UK recently passed the milestone of 50,000 charge points installed. Zap-Map predict this will have doubled again by 2025.[1]

As people increasingly rely on public charging networks to get around, the companion mobile apps are of paramount importance to a stress-free charge experience.

However, user reviews suggest that there's a lot of room for improvement. As a design agency with significant experience designing for automotive and mobility, and prompted by the passing of the 50k milestone, we decided to take a deep dive into the current state of UK EV charging apps to create this 'state of UX report'.

Author's note: our intention here is not to single out any particular provider for praise or criticism; our focus is purely on the user and how their needs are being met. So after the initial discussion of star ratings, we won't include specific examples from our cohort of apps. If you are the provider in question, feel free to reach out for some more bespoke feedback!

[1] Zap-Map prediction, October 2023: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/zap-map_statistics-evcharging-chargepoints-activity-7117836189734182912-WHP3

Approach and scope

Whilst many EV owners will primarily charge their car at home, or on a driveway, our focus for this review is on public or street charging (though a review of home charging apps is in the works, watch this space).

When you need to charge your EV, *you need to charge your EV.* Drivers will be seeking any (compatible) port in a storm and so it also wouldn't be correct to focus only on the top rated, or "fan favourite" apps.

Instead, we started with the top 16 apps by UK coverage, as according to Zap-Map. The full sample set is shown overleaf.

Using GPT-4, we were able to efficiently analyse 4,209 reviews across both iOS and Android to search for common themes, UX issues and ultimately insights into drivers' jobs-to-be-done.

Ratings and reviews referenced are correct as of 17th October 2023. Unfortunately Char.gy and Source London have no public reviews so couldn't be included in our analysis.

THE SAMPLE

The top 16 apps by UK coverage

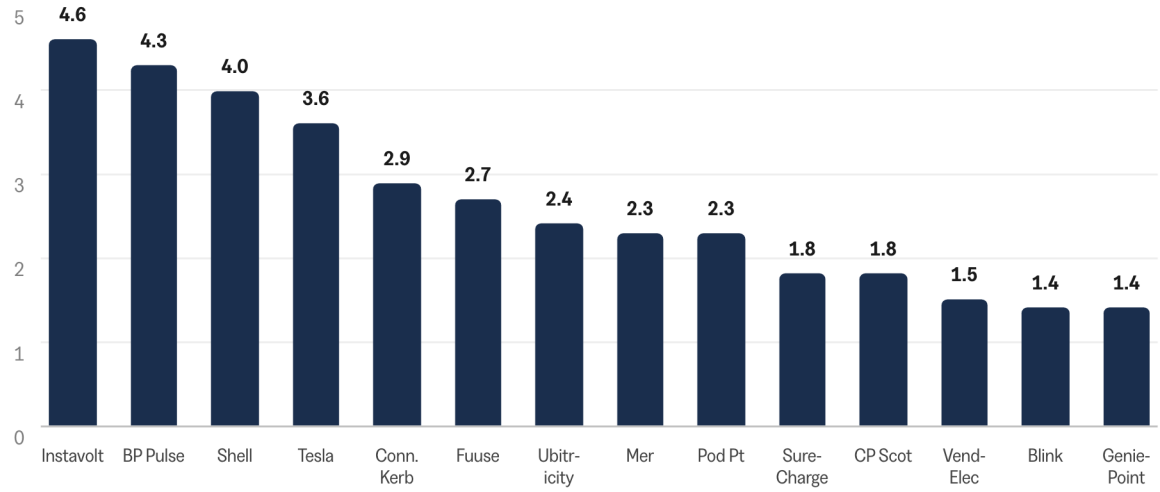
1	Ubitricity / Shell Recharge	
2	Pod Point	
3	BP Pulse	
4	Char.gy	no public reviews
5	Connected Kerb	
6	SureCharge	
7	ChargePlace Scotland	
8	Source London	no public reviews
9	Blink	
10	Instavolt	
11	Fuuse	
12	Mer	
13	GeniePoint	
14	Tesla	
15	VendElectric	

Sample drawn from the top apps by UK coverage, as according to Zap-Map. Char.gy and Source London have no public reviews and so could not be included in the analysis. Ratings and reviews referenced are correct as of 17 October 2023.

Appstore ratings

The first and most obvious insights come from the star ratings left by reviewers on the Apple and Google Play stores. There is quite a range between Instavolt at the top (4.6 out of 5) and both Blink and GeniePoint with the lowest average review (1.4 out of 5):

FIG. 1 · COMBINED WEIGHTED RATING, BY BRAND



Weighted average reviews for the top 14 charging apps across Google Play and Apple stores, in descending order. The weighted average across all apps is 2.6. True as of 17/10/23.

TAKEAWAYS

- The average rating of the top UK charging apps at 2.6 out of 5 is middling to poor.
- A few front-runners are outperforming the average, with the majority lagging behind.
- If you remove the top 4 achieving 3 stars or more, the average score is a very disappointing 2 stars out of 5.

Insights from user reviews

Ratings are one thing, but the real insight comes from diving deep into the voice of the customer, the user reviews themselves.

TL;DR — top insights from the dataset as a whole

1. **User interface and usability.** Across multiple apps, users frequently complain about poor user interface and usability issues.
2. **Customer service and support.** A common theme is the lack of responsive customer service for troubleshooting and assistance.
3. **Payment and pricing.** Users across different apps have issues with payment methods, and some find the cost of charging to be high.

TAKEAWAYS

It may not shock you to learn that experience, customer service and paying for charging are the top recurring themes. But given that these are perhaps the most obvious areas of customer concern, it makes the gap in expectation and experience all the more important for our app providers to work on closing.

Top UX / UI design issues

Drilling deeper into the theme that is both our top insight and top pain point, what are the most common points of friction in the user experience?

1. **Poor navigation:** across apps, users find it difficult to navigate through the features to address their jobs-to-be-done.
2. **Inadequate information display:** users want more (and more accurate) real-time information like charger status and availability.
3. **Login and payment flows:** issues with logging in and payment registration are common across multiple apps. Whilst these are perhaps smaller functional areas, or considered not a core task, it's not hard to see how these are critical hurdles standing between a user and a successful charge.

TAKEAWAYS

- App design should align more closely to and better enable the core user jobs-to-be-done (more on that later).
- Whilst possibly not a fault of the UI, striving to improve the data available to the user via the app will ease a frequent frustration.
- Non-core-but-critical flows like payment and registration require improvement. Stress testing for bugs and ensuring apps 'fail gracefully' are a must (particularly for contexts where mobile data coverage is poor).

Most requested features

In reviews, customers often call for features they miss, or appreciate in other apps they use. What are the most requested features we found?

1. **Real-time charger status:** users frequently ask for real-time updates on charger availability and status. It's worth noting this request will likely only be made when there is a clear mis-match between the app and the real world, so accuracy might be more critical than update speed.
2. **Improved map functionality:** map screens or features are often the primary interface or mode, so more detailed maps, including filters for charger types, availability, and status are frequently requested.
3. **Easier payment methods:** users are looking for streamlined payment options, such as direct payment for kWh used, without needing to top up an account.

TAKEAWAYS

- Unsurprisingly our requested features map closely to the UX/UI design issues, emphasising the perceived importance of these functions for the user job-to-be-done.
- Maps are seen as a critical interface — we note some providers integrate and push users to a native map app like Google Maps, which might lead to issues of context switching.
- Easier ways to pay, particularly avoiding top ups, perhaps points to that moment of frustration trying to initiate a charge, but having to first run through registration and top-up processes, potentially all with poor data coverage.

Jobs-to-be-done and user needs

What can we learn about the user's jobs-to-be-done (JTBD) from our review? The primary job should be obvious:

> *Charge my car away from home*

But within this, several stages or secondary jobs emerge:

1. **Locate a charger:** find the nearest available charging station.
2. **Check charger status:** know if a charger is available, occupied, or out of service before arriving.
3. **Initiate charging:** start the charging process once they arrive at the station.
4. **Monitor charging:** track the progress of their vehicle's charging in real-time.
5. **Make payment:** complete the payment for the charging service effortlessly.
6. **Get support:** when issues arise, contact customer service for resolution.
7. **Plan journeys:** (more occasionally) plan longer trips based on charger locations and availability.
8. **Update account details:** update payment methods or personal information within the app.
9. **View history:** review past charging sessions, costs, and locations.

User needs

'Needs' are the job performer's (in this case most likely the driver's) requirements in getting a job done. They could also be described as 'desired outcomes'. In other words, if a Job tells you **what** a user wants to get done, a Need tells you **how** they would like this to happen.

Our review suggests users are looking for a frictionless experience from start to finish, covering the discovery of chargers, the charging process itself, and any required follow-up or support:

1. The charging experience should be **seamless:** users expect the app to facilitate a smooth charging process, from locating a charger to tracking the charging progress.
2. Chargers should be located **quickly:** users want to easily locate available chargers, supporting the requests for accurate, real-time mapping and status updates.
3. Payment should be **effortless:** a straightforward payment process, without having to go through cumbersome steps or pre-load credit.
4. Support should be **reliable:** when issues arise, users want quick and effective customer service to resolve their problems.
5. Information should be **comprehensive:** users seek detailed information about the charging stations, including types of plugs, charging speed, and current availability.

Scoring these jobs and needs by satisfaction and importance

In the JTBD framework, scoring jobs by satisfaction and importance is the easiest way to spot areas of opportunity: where is the user being underserved? We favour Dan Olsen's ranking methodology:

- **Satisfaction** is ranked on a 7-point scale, where 1 is "very dissatisfied" and 7 is "very satisfied."
- **Importance** is ranked on a 5-point scale, where 1 is "not important" and 5 is "very important."

Using this framework, we've proposed scores based on the data we analysed. The results are shown overleaf.

FIG. 2 · JOBS SCORED BY SATISFACTION AND IMPORTANCE

How well is the industry serving customer jobs?

Job	Satisfaction (1–7)	Importance (1–5)
Locate a charger	4	5
Check charger status	3	4
Initiate charging	5	5
Monitor charging	4	3
Make payment	2	5
Get support	1	4
Plan journeys	3	2
Update account details	4	2
View history	4	1

Jobs scored by satisfaction and importance. Satisfaction is scored on a 7-point scale, importance on a 5-point scale (Dan Olsen's ranking methodology).

FIG. 3 · NEEDS SCORED BY SATISFACTION AND IMPORTANCE

How well is the industry meeting customer needs?

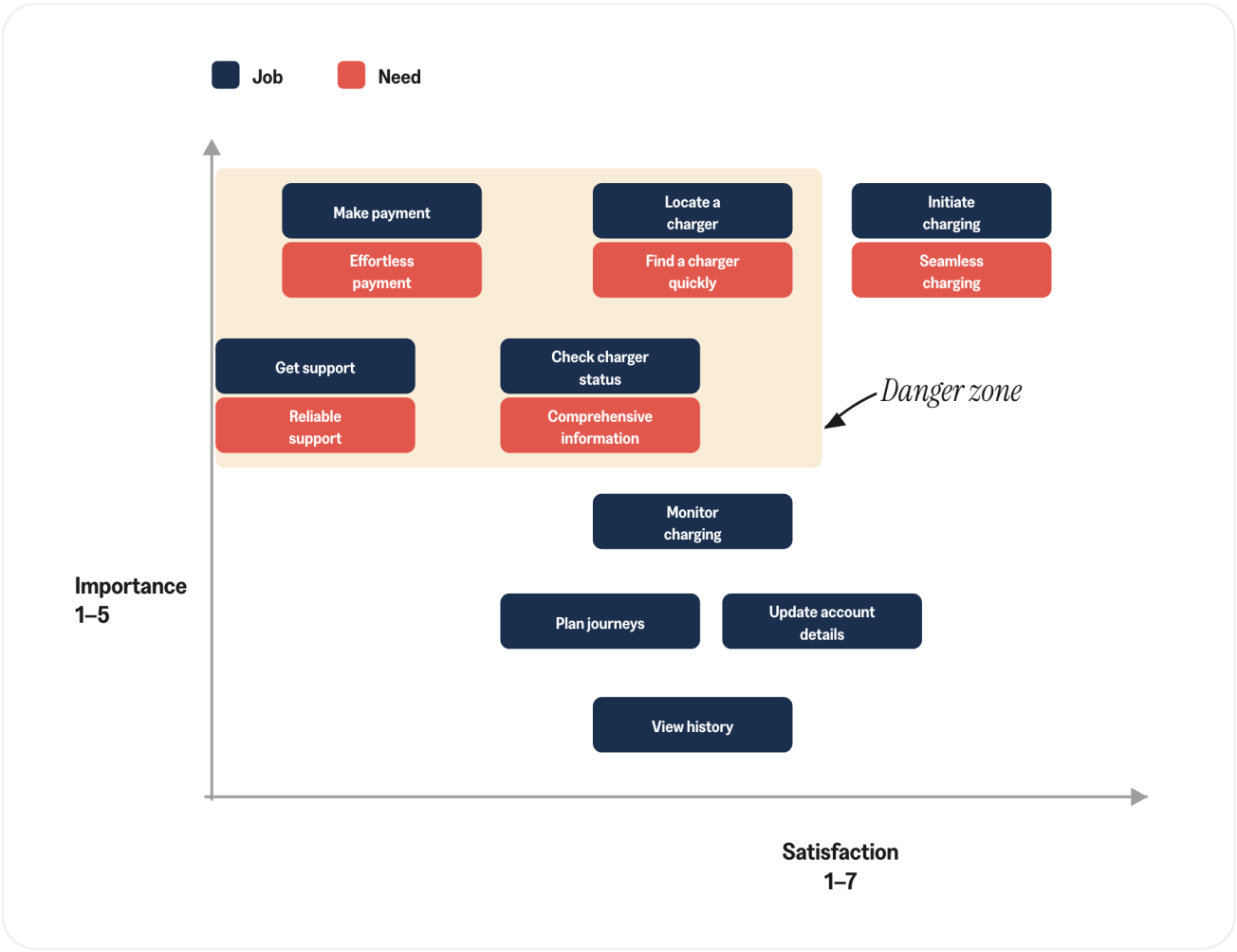
Need	Satisfaction (1–7)	Importance (1–5)
Seamless charging experience	5	5
Find a charger quickly	4	5
Effortless payment	2	5
Reliable support	1	4
Comprehensive information	3	4

Needs scored by satisfaction and importance. Satisfaction is scored on a 7-point scale, importance on a 5-point scale (Dan Olsen's ranking methodology).

Using this framework, we've proposed scores based on the data we analysed — easier to digest, and to spot the underserved jobs and needs (and so where design focus must be), when mapped onto a matrix overleaf.

Easier to digest and spot the underserved jobs and needs (and so where design focus must be) when mapped on a matrix. Four areas are clearly in the danger zone:

FIG. 4 · IMPORTANCE VS SATISFACTION



Jobs (blue) and their matching needs (red) plotted by satisfaction (horizontal) against importance (vertical). The shaded region is the underserved 'danger zone' (high importance, low-to-mid satisfaction): support, payments, charger status and locating a charger are all underserved jobs / needs.

TAKEAWAYS

From this analysis, the customer jobs-to-be-done and their needs are being underserved in four key areas:

- **Customer support**
- **Payments**
- **Checking charger status**
- **Locating a charger**

This provides a clear steer for designers across the market on areas to focus on for best improvement in user experience.

Conclusion

We celebrate the take-up of electric vehicles and the rollout of more charging infrastructure, and the user experience of charging apps has to keep up. The link between the charging UX and the speed of EV adoption should be clear. Our analysis suggests there is a gap between user expectations and experience.

While there are some strong players in the market, user reviews suggest that even the best have room for improvement. As the EV market continues to grow, focusing on user experience will be key to gaining a competitive edge.

Immediate design improvements to the following areas are key:

1. Accurate, real-time data on charger availability is critical.
2. Simplify the payment process.
3. Make app interfaces more user-friendly.

We look forward to checking back on progress in 2024!

WORK WITH US

Are you one of the charging networks we featured in this study — or perhaps you are unhappy to be left out? Either way, if you'd like to receive a more detailed report with insights and recommendations specific to your app, we'd be happy to oblige. Drop us a line at wearesystematic.com/contact, find us on LinkedIn or email hello@wearesystematic.com.

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About We Are Systematic

We Are Systematic is a UK-based strategic UX consultancy. We do strategy-first, evidence-based design work for organisations building safety-critical, regulated or operationally demanding products: automotive and mobility, IoT and AI products, financial systems and energy infrastructure. The throughline across our work is that the surface most users interact with is the smallest visible part of a much larger system, and the design decisions on that surface carry consequences far beyond aesthetics. Our job is to reduce the risk in those decisions: to help teams get the high-stakes ones right before they are expensive to change.

UK public EV charging apps: state of UX review 2023 is our read on the digital experience wrapped around charging an electric car away from home. It is the first in a series of mobile-app UX reviews related to the EV experience, applying the same evidence-based discipline our team brings to regulated, operationally complex products.

This report draws on large-scale qualitative analysis of public app store reviews — 4,209 across the cohort of UK public charging apps — supported by the GPT-4 language model with multi-layered human QA. Any interpretive errors remain our own.

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Automotive and mobility · IoT and AI · Financial services · Energy and electrification

CAPABILITIES

Product strategy · UX/UI design · User research · Rapid prototyping · Proposition testing · Product optimisation

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