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“Calling for (Cellphone) Backup”

In the article “Calling for (Cellphone) Backup”, Anton Troianovski and Spencer E. Ante discuss the consequences of AT&T and Verizon’s different approaches to maintaining usability of their networks during power outages. Whereas Verizon aims to have a backup generator at every cell tower, AT&T operates under the premise that a generator at every tower is too costly and unnecessary to maintain acceptable levels of service during an outage. The practical outcomes of these different approaches were highlighted by the recent Hurricane Sandy, which swept inland on the eastern seaboard of the United States and caused widespread destruction and power outages. While AT&T’s network was functional is most areas of New York after the storm, Verizon’s network developed a reputation for being more reliable in many of the hardest hit areas. This difference in perceived reliability can most likely be attributed to the extra capital Verizon has invested in persuading the owners of the buildings where many of its towers are installed to allow the installation of the large and noisy generators that kept its network running in absence of a functional electrical grid, with AT&T’s generators consuming a mere 40,000 gallons of fuel a day, compared to Verizon’s 100,000.

I find this article interesting because it sheds some light on the attitudes of different carriers towards the level of reliability and functionality they expect out of their network during times of crisis. This insight can be further applied to their attitude toward their network in general, with the widely and, in many cases, correctly held belief that Verizon’s network is far more reliable than AT&T’s, and has far better coverage. While this does not directly affect me, it does give me a certain level of security knowing that Verizon’s network will most likely be functional during a catastrophe, as my Sprint phone can roam onto Verizon’s network when needed. This makes me feel somewhat more secure about the possibility of my phone working during a disaster, though the article gives no information about how my own carrier’s network fared in this instance.