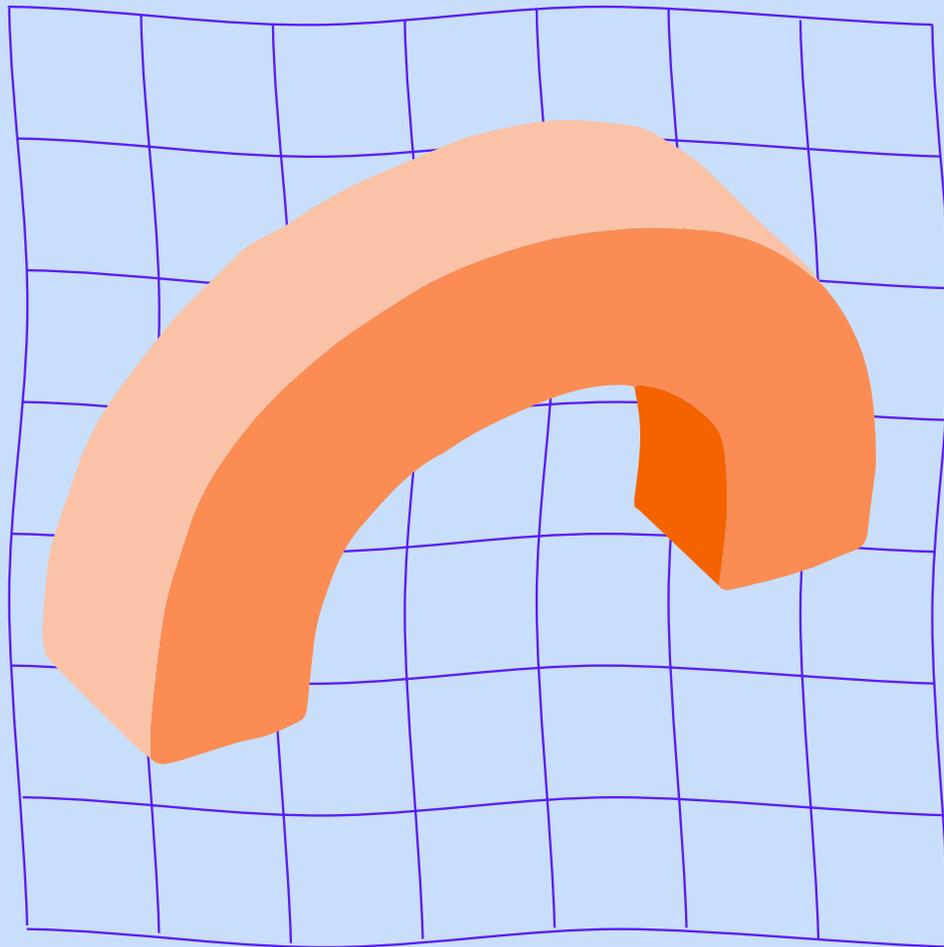


Show reliable information

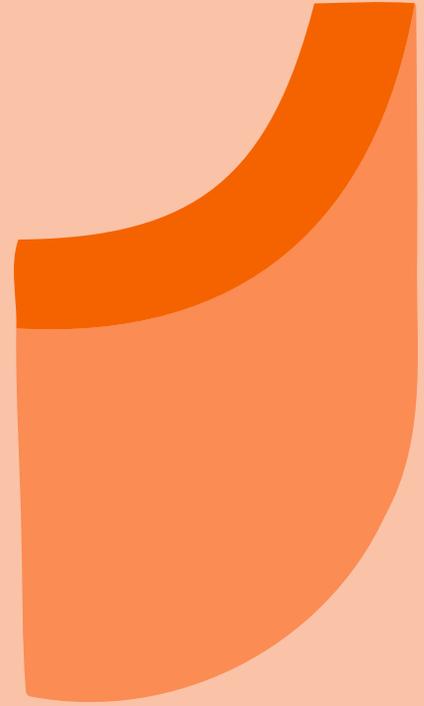


This signal is part of Civic Signals, a larger framework to help create better digital public spaces. We believe it's a platform's responsibility to design the conditions that promote ideal digital public spaces. Such spaces should be designed to help people feel Welcome, to Connect, to Understand and to Act. These four categories encompass the 14 Civic Signals.

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At a glance



Reliable information consists of statements that can be verified using the best available evidence reasonably available to the writer or publisher.

Why It Matters

Mis- and disinformation travel faster than true information, and false beliefs are difficult to change. So we need to supply people with reliable information early and often, and make sure this information comes across people's radar. In the civic sphere, reliable information helps people to decide who to vote for, when it's time to protest or write to their representatives, and how to be a good juror. In health, reliable information helps people decide how to treat and prevent illness. Reliable information is also crucial in emergency situations, such as natural disasters.



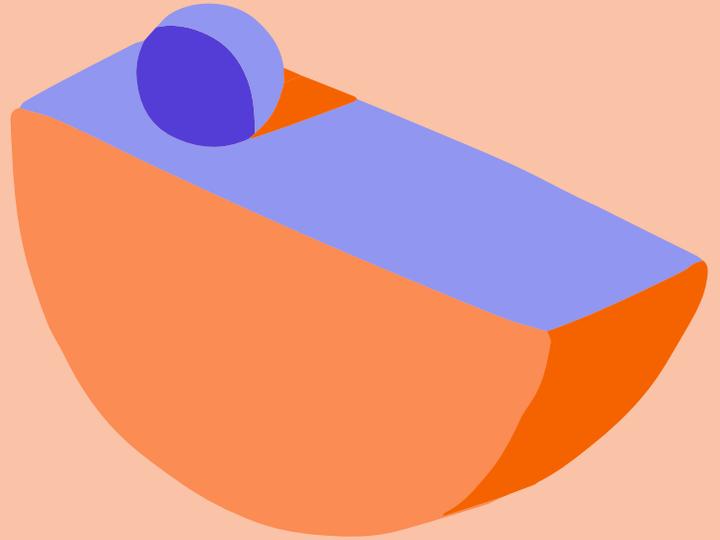
These days everything is manipulated. We are the ones who have to filter things, and give emphasis to the right details.”

– Adriano, Brazilian focus group participant

Putting the Signal Into Practice

- Algorithmic changes: Platforms can alter what they uprank or surface to users by identifying trustworthy sources. One way to identify trustworthy sources is with the Trust Project's indicators. <https://thetrust-project.org/>
- Better connecting platforms and news producers: “Data voids” exist where people seek information on a topic and find only unreliable information. Rapid-fire collaborations between platforms and news outlets could help fill in the blanks. <https://datasociety.net/library/data-voids/>
- See how Facebook talks about reputable information related to the coronavirus crisis here: <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/07/coronavirus/>
- Similarly, here's Google's announcement about surfacing reliable information and addressing misinformation related to coronavirus: <https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/google-news-initiative/covid-19-65-million-help-fight-coronavirus-misinformation/>
- The U.K. Parliament's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee recommended a mandatory Code of Ethics for the tech industry, overseen by an independent regulator, with liabilities for the spreading of harmful misinformation. Find their recommendations here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcmds/1791/1791.pdf>
- The International Fact-Checking Network compiled this database showing how governments around the world are addressing misinformation: <https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/>

Literature review



By Tamar Wilner,
Center for Media Engagement
With thanks to Brendan Nyhan,
Dartmouth College

What the Signal Is

Reliable information consists of statements that can be verified using the best evidence reasonably available to a writer or publisher.

There are many varieties of communication that aren't verifiable. These include opinions ("Millard Fillmore was the best U.S. president") and commands ("Please buy more milk"). These types of communication therefore don't fall under the purview of "reliable information." What we're concerned with here are statements of fact.

What is meant by the "best available evidence"? This can take many forms, depending on what is to be verified. The best evidence on causes of a disease comes from the totality of scientific studies on a topic. The best evidence on what happened in an industrial accident may come from eyewitnesses or from equipment readings. The best evidence on what a politician said may come from the reporter's own ears, or a recording or transcript.

The standard of "best available evidence" will vary according to who's publishing the information, because not everyone has equal access to evidence. A journalist has access to interview notes or recordings and

is therefore expected to report what a politician said to her accurately. However, even journalists aren't privy to all the evidence on the topics they cover; some government documents, for example, are classified.

Therefore it's useful to speak not only of "best available evidence" but also of content generated through reliable processes, such as journalism and science. When journalists follow their industry's ethical standards and up-to-date practical guidance, they create content that is generally reliable. Likewise, scientific standards such as double-blinded, controlled studies and the peer review process help to safeguard the veracity of scientific findings. Both of these processes are fallible, but self-correcting, and they represent some of humanity's best methods for uncovering the truth.

When it comes to platforms, much of the content is posted by users. Ordinary people often don't have the access to the "best available evidence" that journalists or scientists do, or the knowledge and skills to interpret such evidence. But they have access to their own "best available evidence," in the form of reliable journalistic and reference sites. And although they perhaps shouldn't be held to the same standard as journalists, we think users should still be encouraged and guided to think carefully about the potential truth or falsehood of what they post, especially given that content on many platforms is predominately peer-to-peer. So in defining and addressing "reliable information," tech companies should think about differing standards for users and for professional information providers such as media.

Tech companies also must make allowances for the changeability of knowledge.

The state of knowledge is always in flux. For example, until recently, it was true to say, "Humans have never detected a Higgs boson." Now it is no longer true. But it used to be correct based on the evidence at the time.

This is not to say that inaccuracy can be excused by limited evidence. Sometimes news organizations jump to conclusions in the rush to put out breaking news. This has led to some high-profile mistakes, such as when CNN and Fox News reported incorrectly that the U.S. Supreme Court had struck down the individual mandate in the Affordable Care Act.

Inevitably, some facts in a story will have to be updated by even the most careful reporters, and news outlets and platforms can't be held liable for the inevitable lag between the ground truth changing and their stories reflecting that change. In the aftermath of a natural disaster or terrorist attack, for example, the number of dead usually, sadly, rises over time. Our definition of reliable information, however, takes into account that what is reliable can change.

Related Concepts

Reliable information stands in contrast to misinformation and disinformation. Mis/disinformation expert Claire Wardle and technology researcher Hossein Derakhshan defined misinformation as false information shared without malicious intent, and disinformation as false information knowingly spread to cause harm. In practice, it can be difficult to distinguish between mis- and disinformation, and one piece of content can in fact be both. The motivations of those who make false claims are often unclear or unknown, and could well be far from mali-

cious. For example, many people post about bogus “health cures” because they really feel those treatments helped them. In addition, false claims – even those that are launched maliciously – may be spread by others inadvertently, or with positive intentions.

With the current signal, as with all the others, we strive to focus on maximizing the positive rather than minimizing the negative. For that reason, we focus here on the need for platforms to identify and surface reliable information, as opposed to the admirable efforts to curb mis- and disinformation.

Why It's Important

Modern technologies, especially the internet and social media, have allowed information to spread at an unprecedented rate. This can be a good thing when it comes to verified facts, but the acceleration of information also applies just as much - if not more - to misinformation and disinformation. Computer scientists Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral, for example, studied about 126,000 stories tweeted by roughly 3 million people, and found that untrue claims spread “significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly” than true claims. Although we turn shortly to the benefits of elevating reliable information, we first briefly outline lessons learned from the study of mis- and disinformation.

Mis- and disinformation covers a wide variety of topics, much of it with important real-world ramifications. Recently, the coronavirus pandemic brought unprecedented levels of attention to the problem of widespread false information, which the World Health Organization calls an “infodemic.” A

video watched by more than 8 million people falsely claimed that wearing masks can lead to infection with coronavirus. In Iran, hundreds of people died after drinking methanol alcohol, which social media posts had claimed was a cure. False information about vaccines may have contributed to declines in measles vaccination in many parts of the world. In Pakistan, a polio vaccination worker and a guard were killed because of false beliefs and conspiracy theories, while nearly one million children went unvaccinated. As another example, online rumors have stoked ethnic violence in Myanmar, India, and Sri Lanka, including riots and mob-led attacks.

Providing reliable information in response to misperceptions can sometimes be effective in changing beliefs, as communication scholars Emily Vraga and Leticia Bode have found. But in other cases, it can be difficult to root out false beliefs; according to research led by political scientists Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, people may be especially inclined to believe misinformation that supports deeply-held identities, such as political affiliations.

Because mis- and disinformation travel faster than true information, and because false beliefs are difficult to change, it's important to supply people with reliable information early and often, and make sure this information comes across people's radar.

In the civic sphere, reliable information helps people make voting decisions, decide whether to protest, determine whether to volunteer or write to their representatives, and understand how to be a good juror. For example, in the 2011 Egyptian uprising that forced the resignation of president Hosni Mubarak, activists used social media to spread information about the

latest human rights violations committed by the Mubarak regime, communication researcher Nahed Eltantawy and sociologist Julie Wiest described.

Communication scholar Michael X. Delli Carpini and political scientist Scott Keeter wrote that political knowledge has positive outcomes, such as promoting political tolerance, encouraging political participation, building stable opinions, helping people identify their true interests, and assisting people with matching their vote to their interests. We discuss the particular type of knowledge required for informed citizenship under the **Build Civic Competence** signal. Here, we focus on the reliability of information in general.

Reliable information has many other benefits, affecting nearly all the decisions one makes in life. This can include when to see a doctor and what treatment to choose for an illness, where to live, how to spend or invest one's money, and much more. For many people, it's also important for their jobs to keep up with the latest news, economist Christine Benesch noted.

The publication of reliable information benefits not just individuals, but organizations, communities, and society at large. If platforms prioritize showing reliable information to their users, this will encourage media outlets to concentrate efforts on the reliability of the content they produce. This then could strengthen the media's role as an accountability check on government and other powerful entities and individuals, which may in turn lead to more responsive government.

In addition, non-profit organizations that publish reliable information on themselves, such as their activities, objectives, perfor-

mance and governance, can boost their level of public trust, communication scholar Kristen Lovejoy and accounting professor Gregory Saxton argued. Such organizations can also connect target audiences to relevant community resources.

Reliable information is also crucial in emergency situations, such as natural disasters. Communication researcher J. Brian Houston and colleagues, in a review of the literature, found 15 ways social media was used for disaster communication. These include providing disaster preparedness information, warning that a disaster is imminent, and documenting the disaster.

How We Can Move the Needle

As mentioned earlier, there is an urgent need for people to have access to reliable information. But the word "access" here is key: Simply pumping more reliable information into the ecosystem won't help on its own, because people need to come across that information and engage with it by reading, watching or listening. There are several forces that prevent encounters and engagement with reliable information. First, some people's engagement with the news is quite limited. In particular, some opt out of news entirely when they have other, more entertaining, options, political scientist Markus Prior documented. Newspapers used to function as information "bundles" and, at certain times of day, television offered only news on all available channels. These features of the media ecosystem exposed people to a variety of news, even when they weren't searching it out. Nowadays, we have lost several of these chance encounters.

Second, people also tend not to engage with a great variety of information providers, instead cultivating “repertoires” of a few media sources, studies have consistently found (see our referenced study by journalism researcher Stephanie Edgerly for a good overview). When applied to efforts to counter mis- and disinformation, people are unlikely to see corrective information that appears somewhere besides the original information source. In fact, because of poor visibility practices by the news media, people are unlikely to see corrections published by the same outlet as the original misinformation, journalist Craig Silverman has found.

There is also concern that the prevalence of likeminded information makes it unlikely that people will encounter reliable information that runs counter to their beliefs. Some blame social media algorithms for feeding us information similar to that with which we’ve already engaged, and there is evidence of a small effect, according to Facebook data scientist Eytan Bakshy and colleagues. But what seems to be more important in determining exposure to “attitude-challenging content” on social media, according to Bakshy’s work, is whether we choose to engage with those posts.

So “moving the needle” here means not simply producing reliable information, but making the changes necessary to get reliable information in front of people. Those changes could well be algorithmic, with platforms changing what they uprank and surface to users. Determining how to detect reliable information, as discussed in the next section, would enable digital platforms to uprank this content algorithmically.

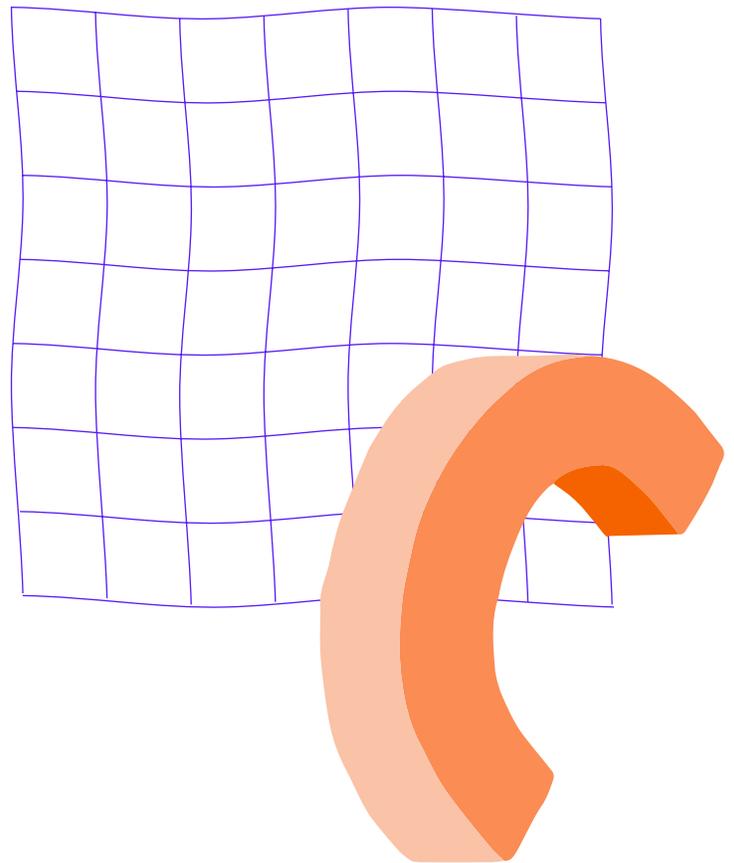
There are other examples worth considering that show how people can get reliable information they didn’t get before. For example, fact-checking outlet Africa Check maintains an Info Finder, which lists reliable primary sources of data and other information on topics ranging from health to migration, from elections to agriculture. In addition, Africa Check and FactCheck.org both let people submit questions about information that they come across and find suspicious. FactCheck.org maintains a webpage listing the false and misleading rumors it’s been asked about most, with links to the full articles debunking the claims. Platforms are also experimenting with how to involve users in detection and review of mis/disinformation. These sorts of ideas could inspire other products that could be incorporated into platforms to try to surface more reliable information.

How to Measure

One way to measure the reliability of information involves fact checking. Fact checkers assess the truthfulness (or lack thereof) of messages by referencing the best available evidence. In the context of this signal, however, fact checking is not a cure-all because it takes time and is difficult to scale, and fact checkers tend to concentrate on claims they suspect need debunking. This can allow platforms to downplay unreliable information but doesn’t allow them to play up reliable information per se. It is important to assess how fact-checking work can be complemented by algorithmic and other human interventions.

Another approach is to focus not on the reliability of individual articles or pieces of information, but on the credibility of information producers. Credibility is how much an information source can be depended upon to provide reliable information. If we determine the overall credibility of an information source, we can be assured that there is a higher likelihood of their output being reliable – though we can't guarantee that every single item they produce will consist of reliable information. Still, a source with high credibility ratings should be trusted to provide reliable information compared to one with low credibility ratings.

We can approximate credibility by looking at characteristics of the news outlet. For example, member news organizations in the Trust Project declare whether they comply with eight “trust indicators.” The outlets publish disclosure statements on these indicators, which address topics such as author expertise, methods, and diverse voices. Other organizations, such as the News Integrity Initiative, NewsGuard, Nobias, and the Credibility Coalition, are looking for digital signals that can distinguish reliable from unreliable sources.



Foundational Works

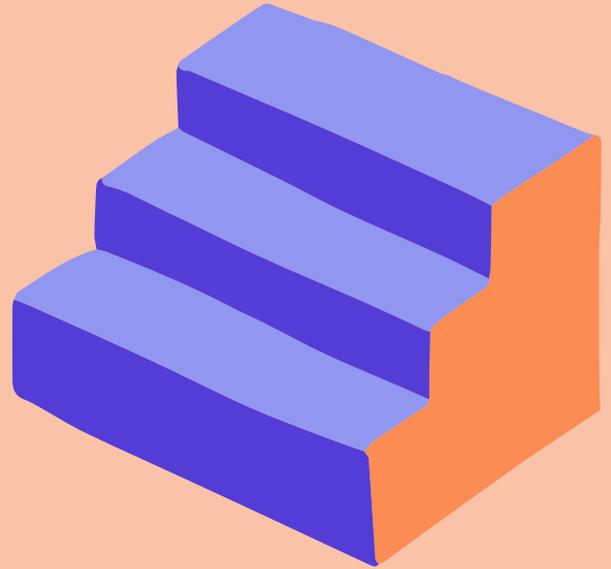
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Expert Q&A



Three key questions with **Brendan Nyhan**, Dartmouth College

How does this principle help create a world we'd all want to live in?

When social media platforms surface reliable information, they accomplish two important goals. First, the public will be better informed. Social media outlets are an important source of news for people around the world. At their best, they can help expose people to useful, high-quality information they would not have otherwise encountered from people they know and groups and institutions they trust. But too often, low quality information, including false or misleading claims, disseminate widely on social media, misleading people about politics, health, and other important

topics. When the information people see online is reliable, people are more likely to get the information they need to make good decisions in their lives.

In addition, social media outlets that surface reliable information help encourage other actors to promote quality information. In this world, media outlets have greater incentives to produce reliable information because it will be amplified on social media, not clickbait or sensationalized headlines. Similarly, politicians and other actors would be encouraged to create and promote reliable information that would be seen by the public; those who instead seek to disseminate false, misleading, or otherwise

unreliable claims would be ignored. This second-order effect could have a strong impact on the kinds of information people see.

If you were to envisage the perfect social media, messaging or web search platform in terms of maximizing this principle, what would it look like?

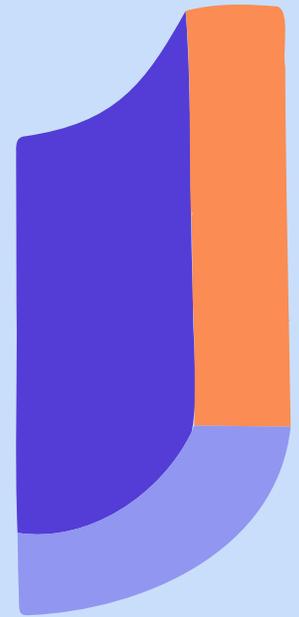
Perfection is hard to define given the impossibility of defining what is true in a simple way and how frequently the state of human knowledge changes, but social media platforms that performed well on this metric would repeatedly and consistently surface information from outlets and institutions that have a track record of (general) accuracy and self-correction and which is consistent with the best available information from other outlets and institutions. Ultimately, this information could be shown to be valid by comparison with ground truth at a rate at or above what we would expect from high-quality information sources. The platform would likewise show little evidence of the spread of dubious or low-quality information from unreliable sources.

How would you measure a messaging, social media, or web search platform's progress against this principle?

Measurement is an extremely difficult problem. Given the impossibility of evaluating whether every piece of content is true at scale, platforms will necessarily need to rely on signals about the sources of the information. One way of determining what information is reliable is whether it originates from an institution or media outlet that produces knowledge or news reports in a manner that is reliable, which can be determined by outcome-based measures (past indicators of false information), signals

that are not specific to content reliability but correlated with it (violations of platform policies, signals about the content such as the number of ads on the page, etc.), and proxies for reliable processes (human ratings of outlet quality, transparency, and news values such as NewsGuard ratings). These can be measured over time both on the supply side (the fraction of content being shared that meets these standards) and the demand side (the fraction of the news content that people see which falls into these categories). Other signals that can be tracked and assessed over time include fact-checking rates (whether through direct partnerships or by identifying content flagged independently by fact-checkers) and reporting by users of dubious or false content, though it is important to recognize that such reports are rare events and endogenous to factors such as news values (for journalists) and the informational context in which claims are being assessed (which may cause idiosyncratic variation in when claims are flagged and how often/by whom). A final approach might be to consider randomized audits by fact-checkers or crowd-sourced assessments of the validity of randomly selected news stories to try to better characterize the reliability of site-level information flows directly rather than relying on proxy measures or non-random reporting, though doing so in a careful way would be an ambitious task.

Survey results



**By Jay Jennings, Taeyoung Lee,
Tamar Wilner, and Talia Stroud,
Center for Media Engagement**

We conducted a survey with participants in 20 countries to understand more deeply how the signals resonated with people globally. Please find more about the methodology [here](#).

The survey asked people to evaluate whether it was important for platforms to “show reliable information,” and asked people to assess how well the platforms perform with respect to this signal. People were only asked about the platforms for which they are “superusers,” by which we mean people who identify the platform as their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

We analyzed how different demographic and political groups rate the importance of this signal, as well as the platforms' performance. In particular, we looked at age, gender, education, ideology, and country. We did this analysis for five platforms:

Google, Facebook, YouTube, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp.¹ Only statistically significant results are shown and discussed.

¹ The analyses include only countries where at least 200 people responded that the social/ message/ search platform was the one that they use most frequently, and then only those platforms where we had data for at least 1,000 people. For Google, this includes all 20 countries. For Facebook, this includes 18 countries and excludes Japan and South Korea. For YouTube, this includes Brazil, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, and the United States. For Facebook Messenger, this includes Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, the U.K., and the United States. For WhatsApp, this includes all countries except Canada, Japan, Norway, Poland, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States. Note that the total number of respondents varies by platform: Google = 19,554; Facebook = 10,268; YouTube = 2,937; Facebook Messenger = 4,729; and WhatsApp = 10,181. The larger the sample size, the smaller the effect that we are able to detect.

Importance of the Signal

We first examined whether platform superusers thought that the signal was important. This was the most important of all 14 signals for Google superusers in 18 countries, Facebook superusers in two countries, and YouTube superusers in two countries.

Importance ranking: Show reliable information

A ranking of "1" means that the signal was seen as the most important of the 14 signals for superusers of a given platform in a given country based on a survey of over 20,000 people across 20 countries.

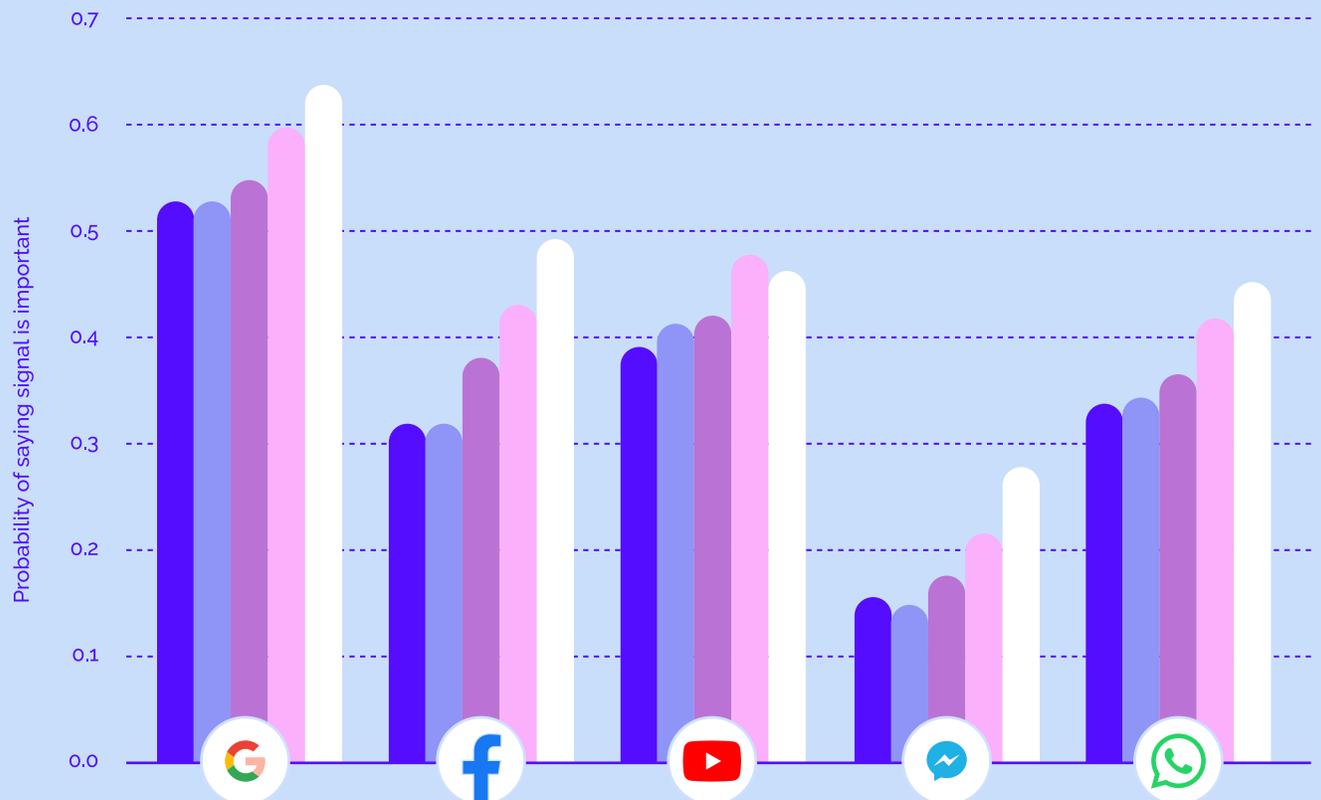


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording: Which of the following do you think it is important for [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] to do? Please select all that apply. Data only shown for those countries where at least 200 survey respondents said that the platform was their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

Importance of the Signal by Age²

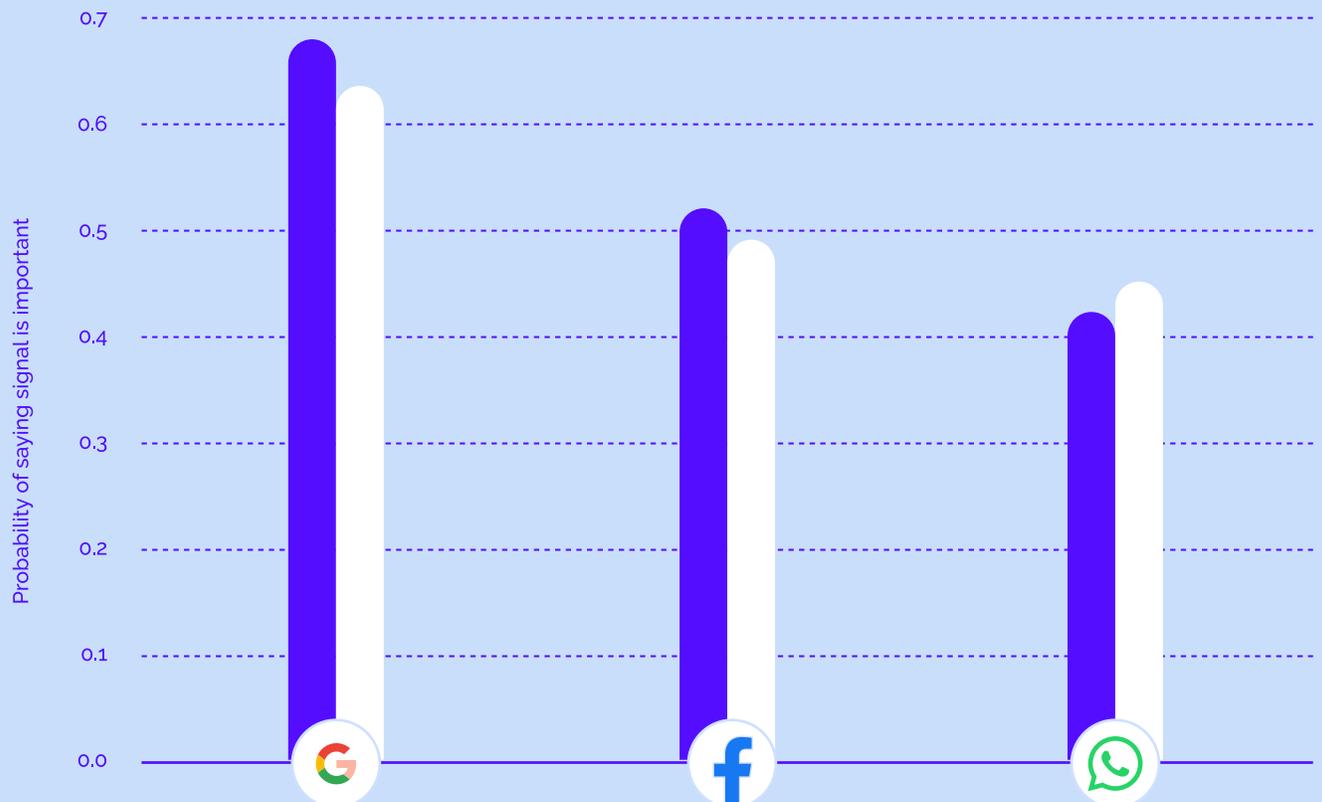
Age predicted whether superusers thought that "showing reliable information" was important for all five of the platforms we examined, where those who were older were more likely to think that the signal was important than those who were younger.

² Results shown are predicted probabilities, calculated from a logistic regression analysis predicting that the signal is important based on age, gender, education, ideology, and country, each treated as a categorical variable. The baseline (based on the excluded categories) is a 55+ year old male with high education and middle ideology from the United States (except for WhatsApp, where the baseline is South Africa).



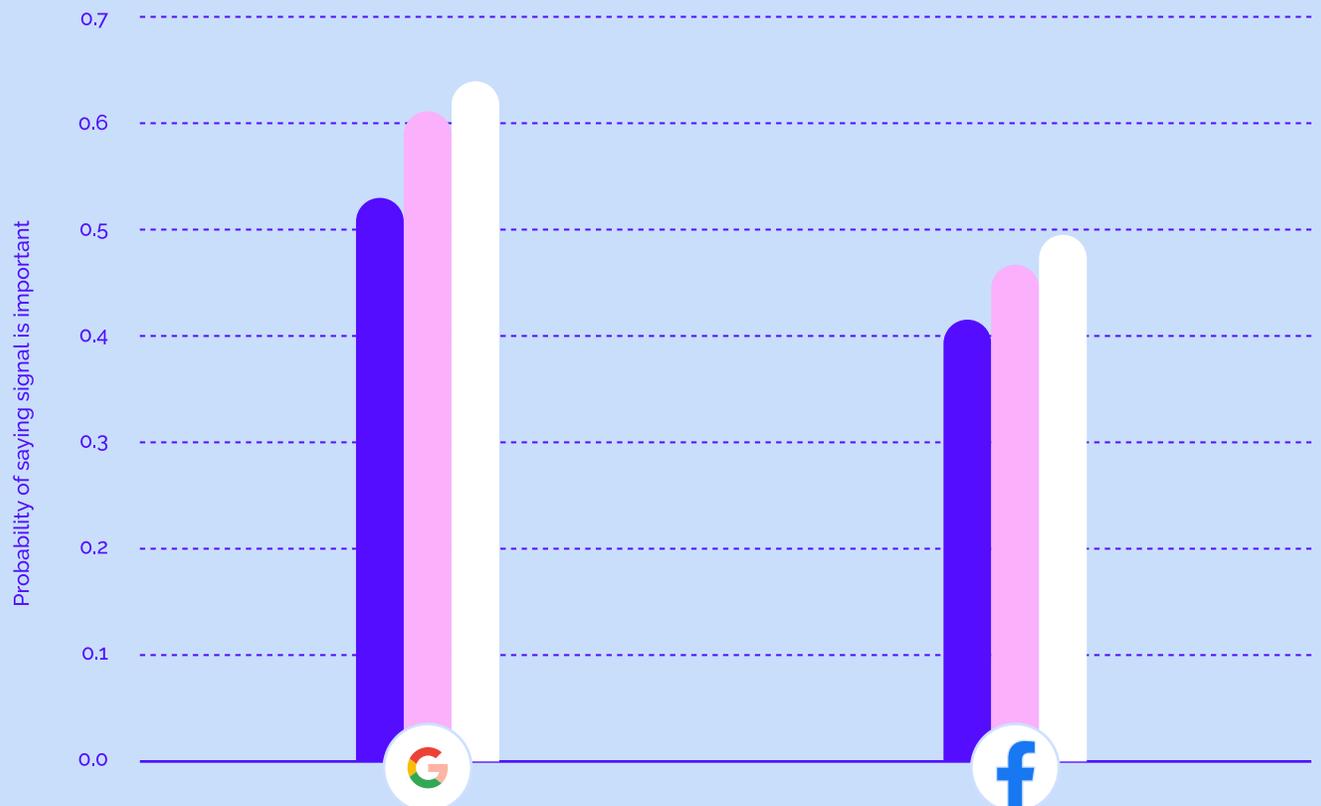
Importance of the Signal by Gender

Men and women differed in the importance they ascribed to "showing reliable information" for three of the platforms: Google, Facebook, and WhatsApp. For Google and Facebook, women were more likely to think that the signal was important than men. For WhatsApp, men were more likely than women to say that the signal was important.



Importance of the Signal by Education

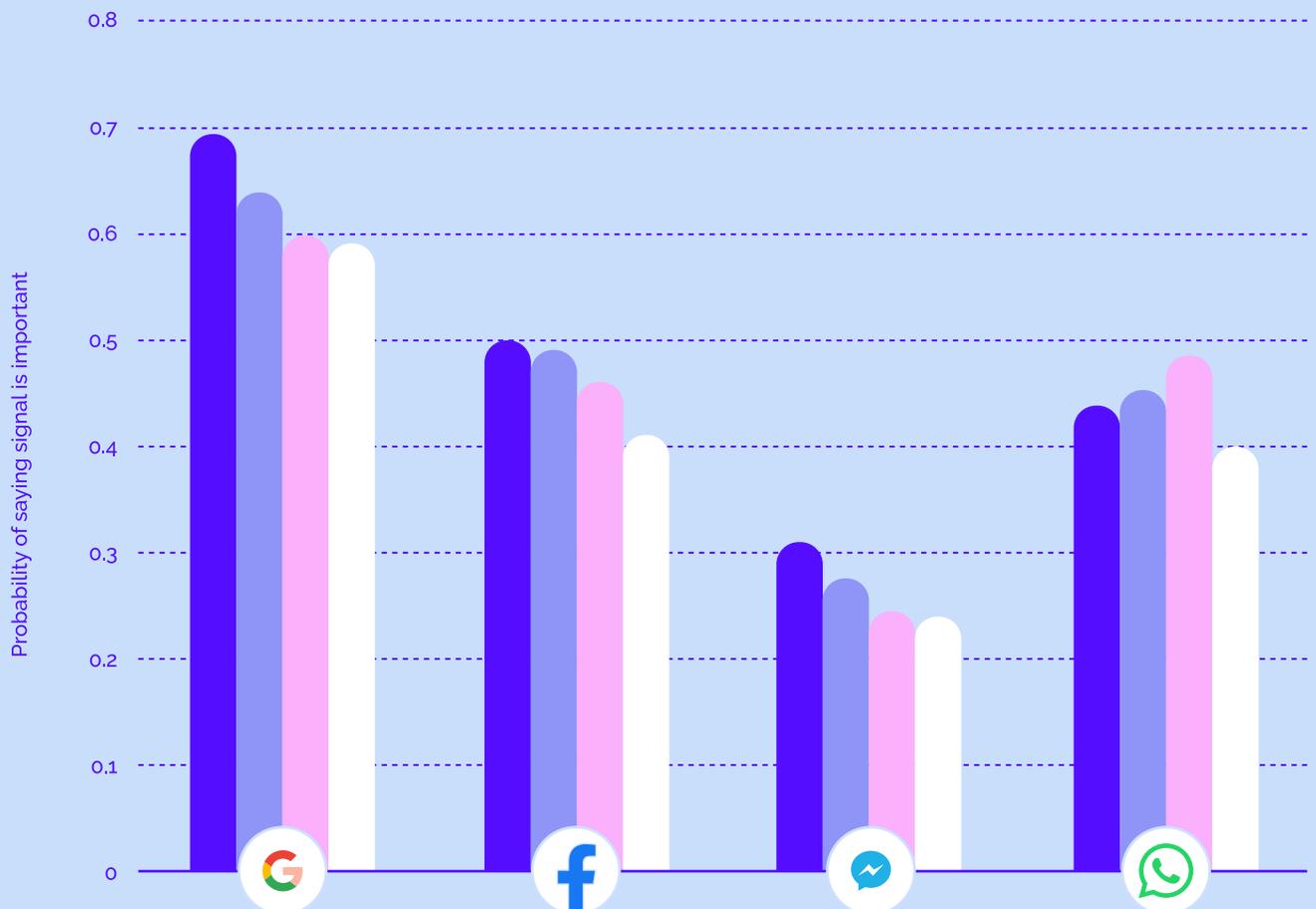
The importance of "showing reliable information" varied by education only for Google and Facebook superusers. For both platforms, those with higher level of education were more likely to think that the signal was important than those with lower or middle levels of education.



Importance of the Signal by Ideology³

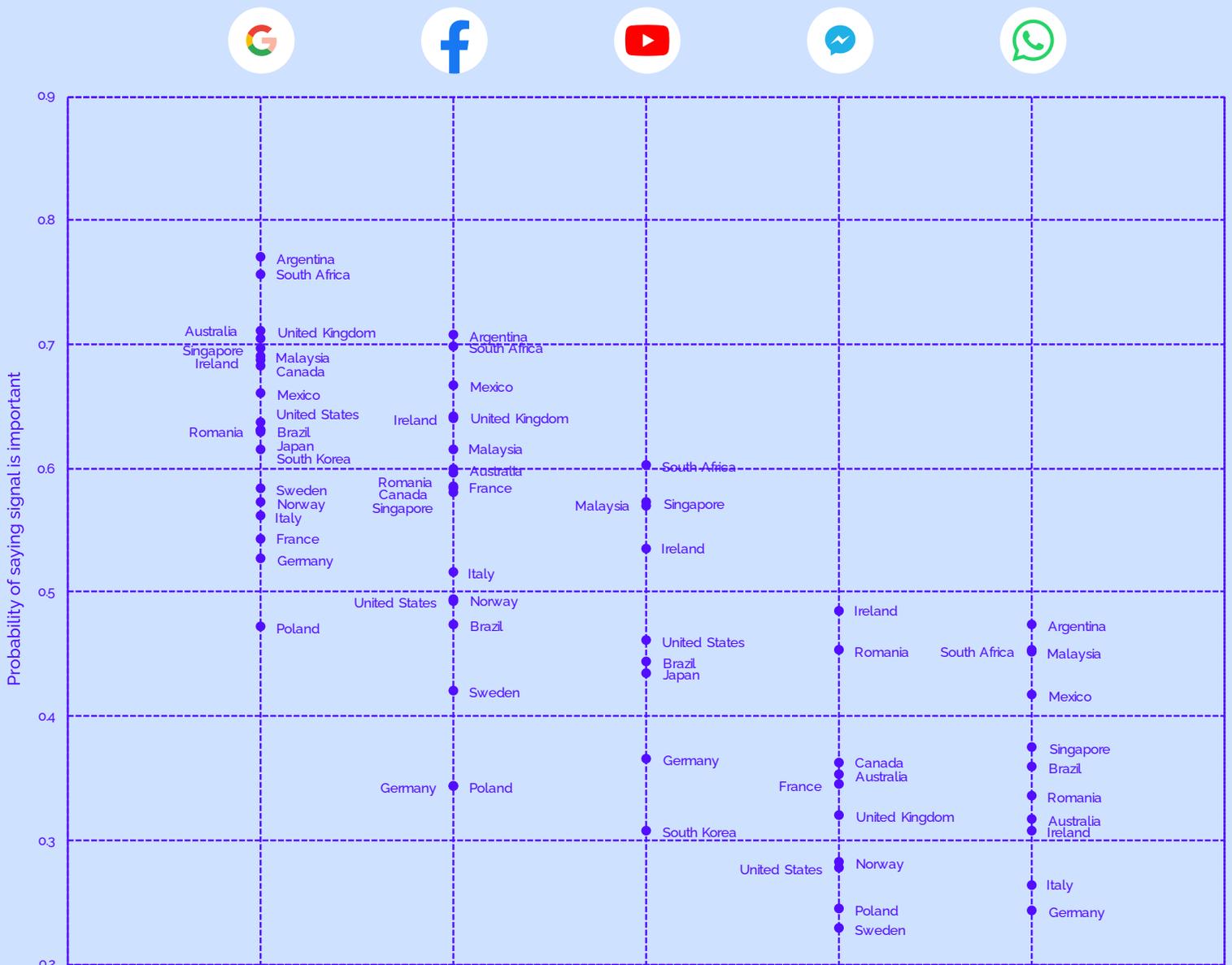
For Google, those on the political left were more likely to say that “showing reliable information” was important compared to those with other ideologies. Those in the middle were also more likely to say that this signal was important compared to those on the right or who didn't know their ideology. For Facebook, those on the left and in the middle were more likely to say that the signal was important than those on the right, and those who didn't know their ideology were less likely to do so than all of the other ideologies. For Facebook Messenger, those on the left were more likely to say that it is important for the platform to show reliable information than those on the right or those who didn't know their ideology. For WhatsApp, those on the right were more likely than all other ideologies to say that this signal was important and those in the middle said it was important more than those who didn't know their ideology.

³ Ideology was asked on a 10-point scale and people were given the option of saying “don't know.” This was recoded into 4 categories (1 through 3, 4 through 7, 8 through 10, and “don't know”).



Importance of the Signal by Country

There was significant variation by country for all five of the platforms we examined based on how important superusers thought that "showing reliable information" was. The chart below shows the probability of saying that the signal is important by platform and by country. Overall, superusers in Argentina, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and Malaysia were more likely to endorse this signal as important across platforms. Fewer superusers endorsed the signal as important across platforms in Poland, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Italy.



Platform Performance on the Signal

For specific platforms, superusers were first asked to say on which of the signals they thought that the platform was doing well, and then on which of the signals they thought that the platform was doing poorly. We then categorized people's responses as (0) believe that the platform is doing poorly, (1) believe that the platform is doing neither well nor poorly, or (2) believe that the platform is doing well. Superusers tended to rate the platforms' performance as neither extremely poor nor extremely good. Google performed best on this signal, and Facebook performed the worst.

Performance index: Show reliable information

Responses of "2" indicate that everyone in a particular country thought that the platform was performing well on a signal; responses of "0" indicate that no one in a particular country thought that the platform was performing well on a signal based on a survey of over 20,000 people across 20 countries.

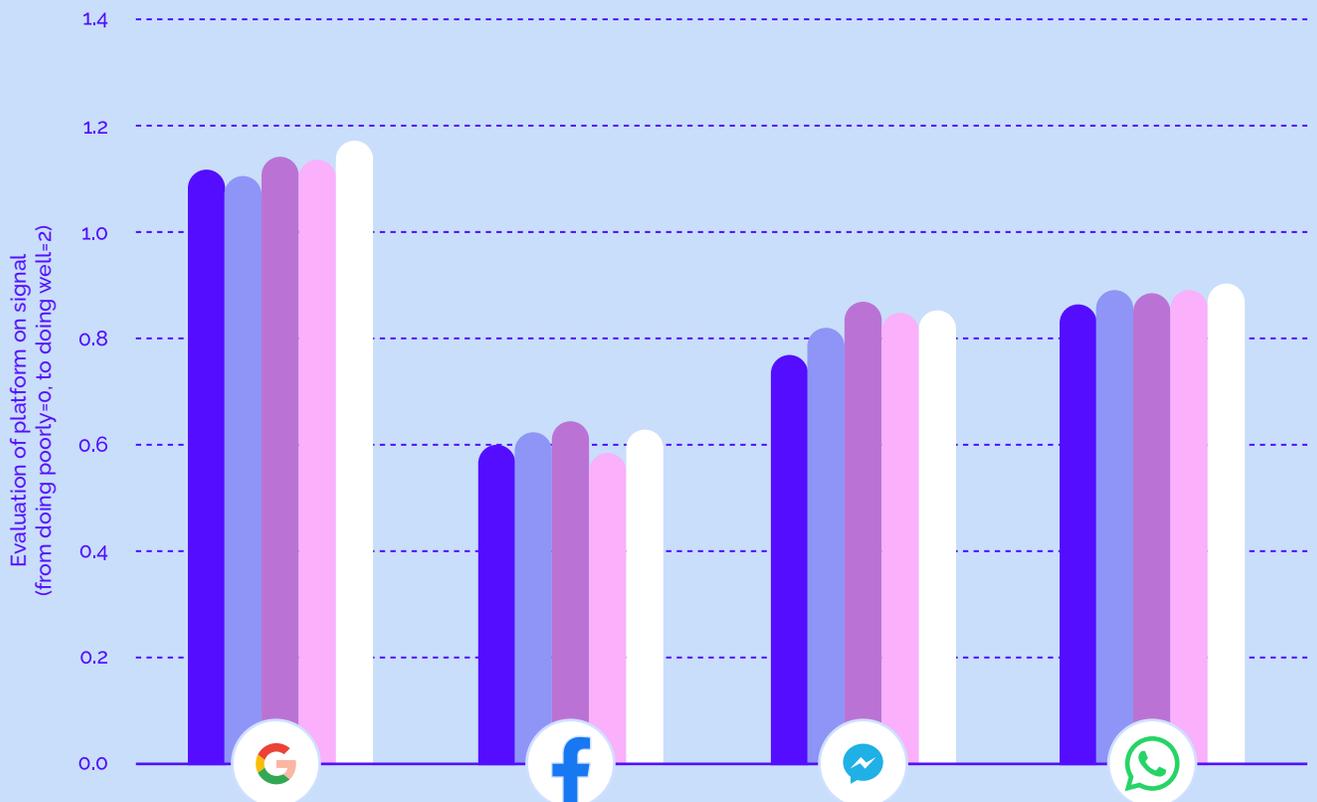


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording - Which of the following do you think [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] does well at? Please select all that apply. And which of the following do you think [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] does poorly at? Please select all that apply. Data only shown for those countries where at least 200 survey respondents said that the platform was their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

Platform Performance on the Signal by Age⁴

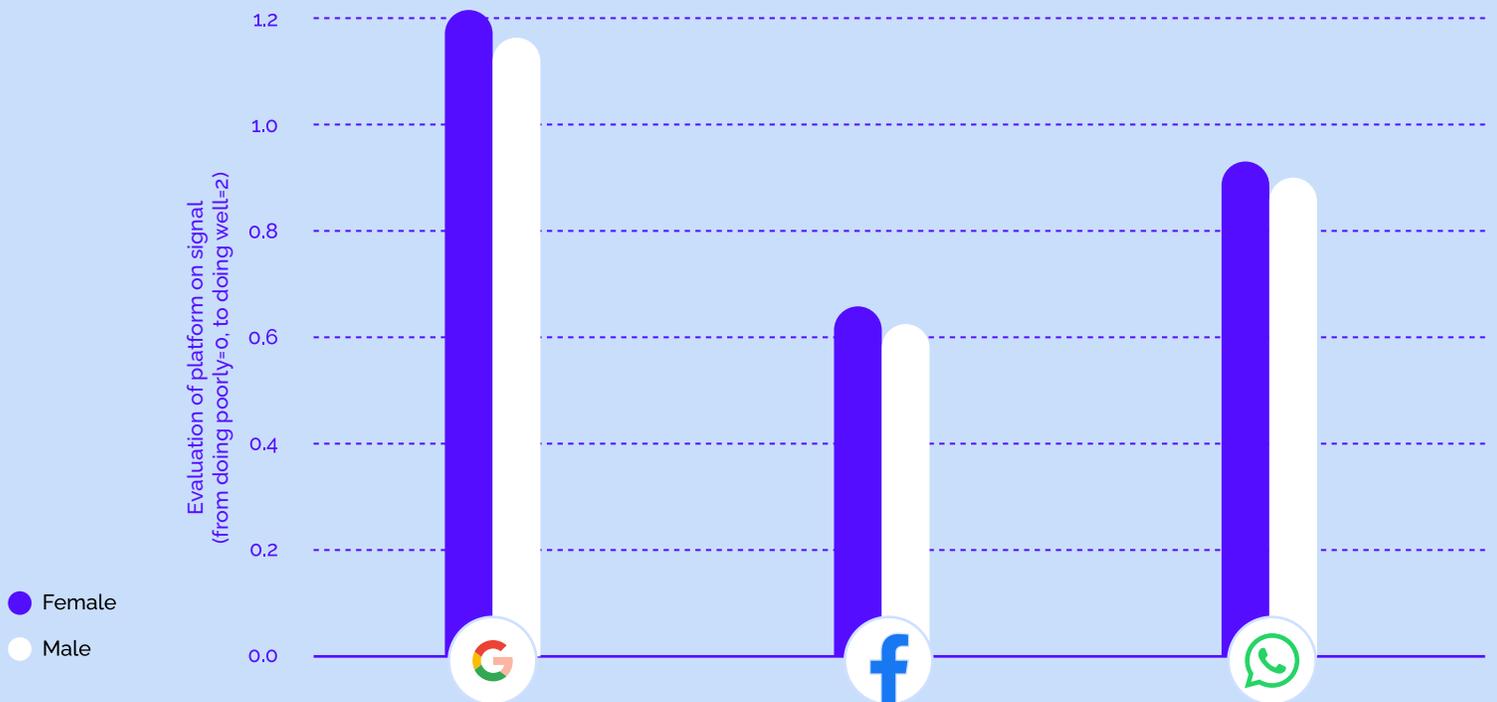
For Google, those 55+ rated the platform's performance on "showing reliable information" more positively than did those 18-34 and those 45-54. For Facebook, those 55+ and those 35-44 rated the platform's performance more positively than did those 45-54. For Facebook Messenger, those 35-55+ rated the platform's performance more positively than did those 18-24. Finally, for WhatsApp, those 55+ rated the platform's performance more positively than those 18-24 years old did.

⁴ Results shown are predicted responses, calculated from a regression analysis predicting that the signal is important based on age, gender, education, ideology, and country, each treated as a categorical variable. The baseline (based on the excluded categories) is a 55+ year old male with high education and middle ideology from the United States (except for WhatsApp, where the baseline is Germany).



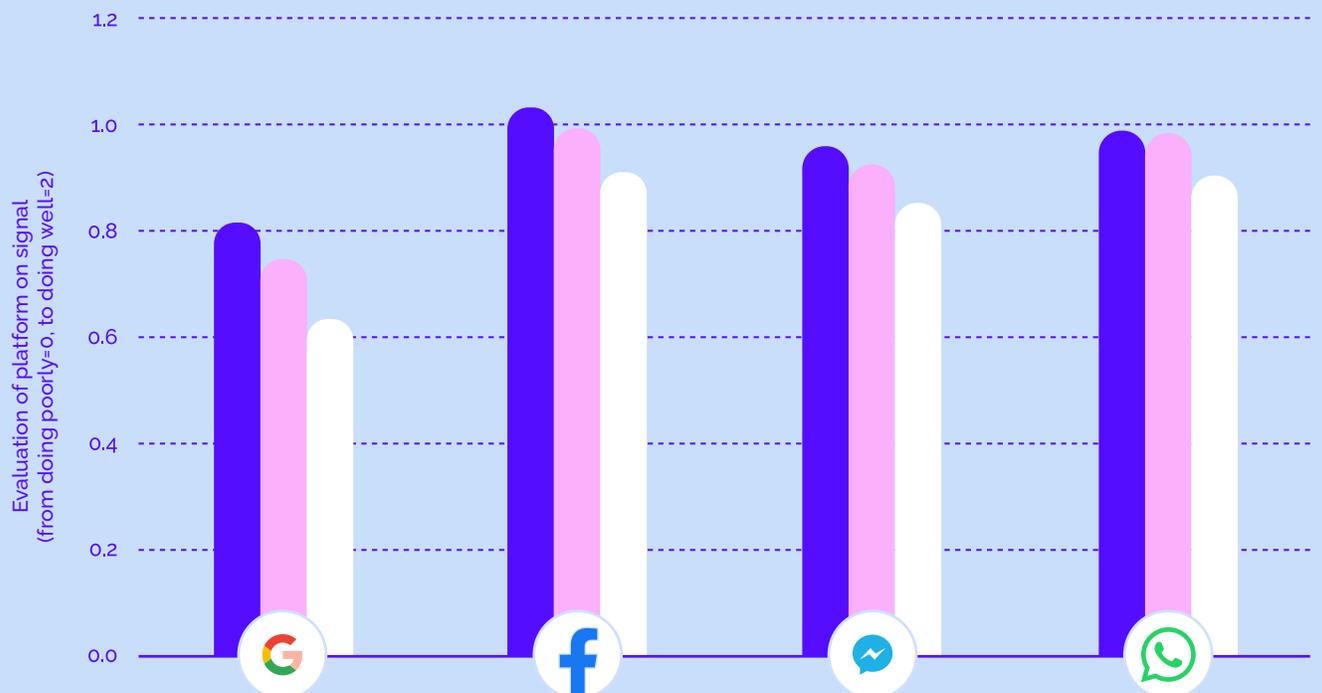
Platform Performance on the Signal by Gender

For Google, Facebook, and WhatsApp, women rated the platforms' performance on "showing reliable information" better than did men.



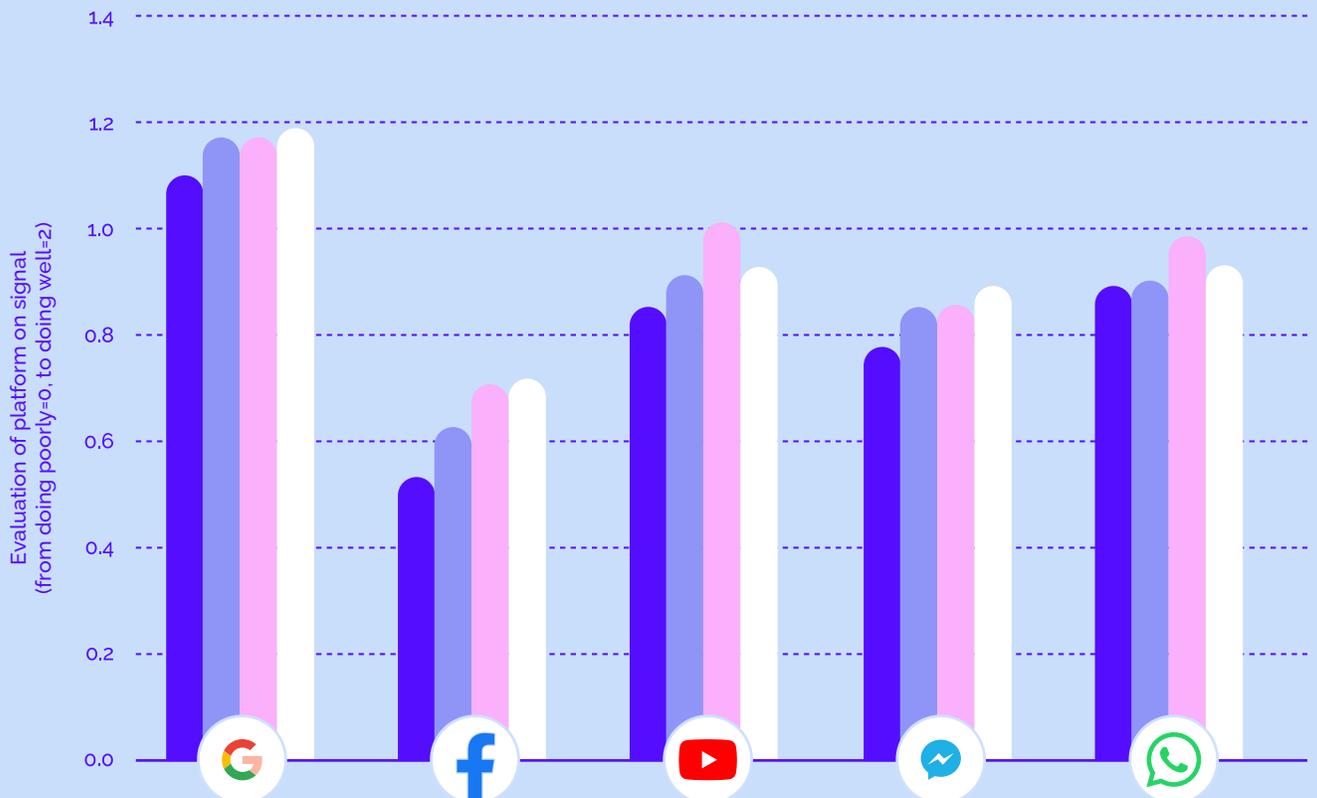
Platform Performance on the Signal by Education

For four platforms, education significantly predicted what superusers thought about how well the platform was doing at “showing reliable information.” Here, less educated superusers rated the platform more positively than did more educated superusers.



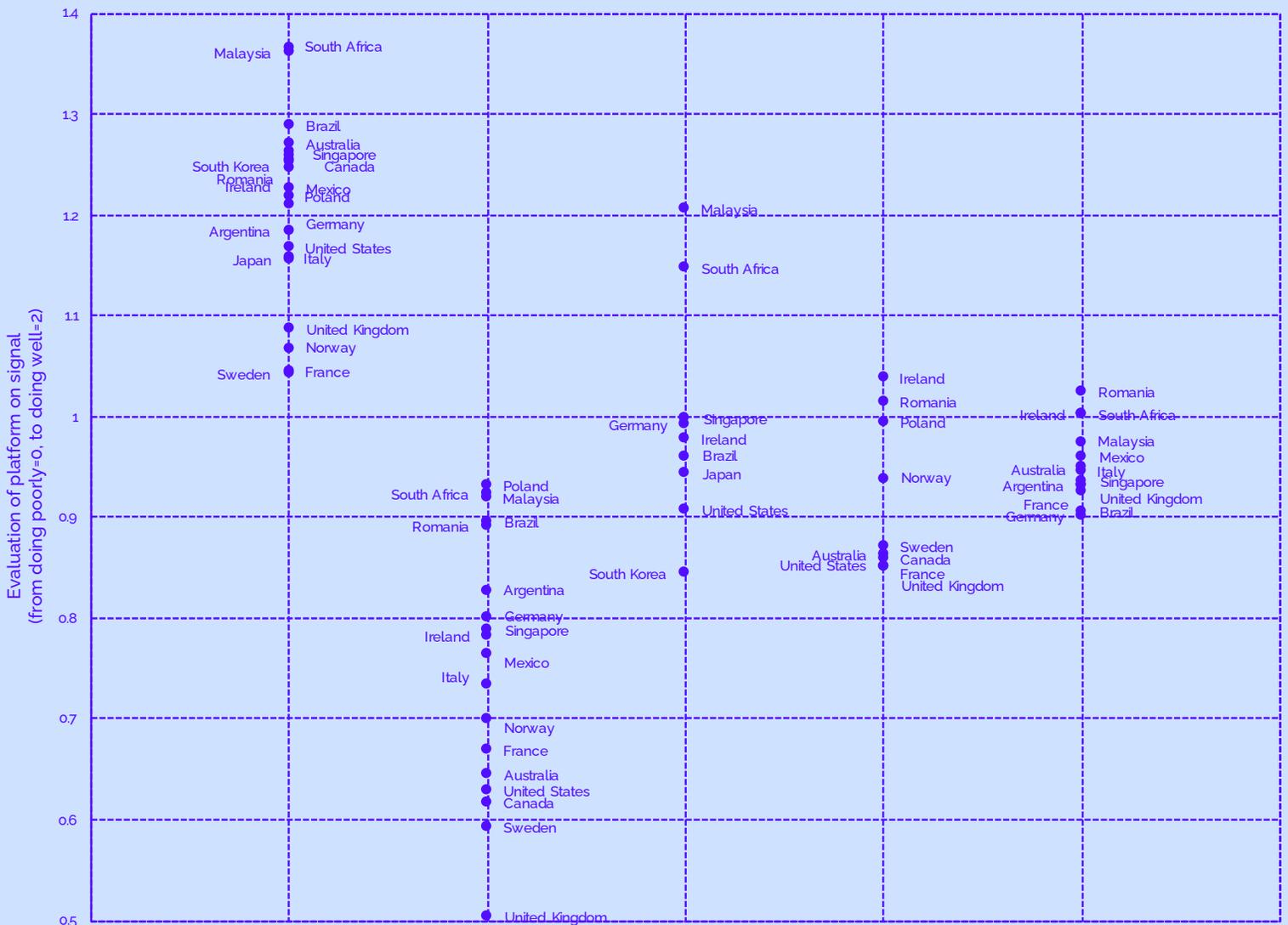
Platform Performance on the Signal by Ideology

The importance of “showing reliable information” varied by ideology for all five of the platforms we examined. For Google, Facebook, and Facebook Messenger, the left evaluated the platform’s performance more poorly than those with other ideological views. For Facebook, those on the right and those who didn’t know their ideology evaluated the platform more positively than those in the middle or on the left politically. For YouTube and WhatsApp, those on the right evaluated the platform’s performance more positively than did those with other political ideologies. For WhatsApp, those who didn’t know their ideology evaluated the platform’s performance more positively than those on the political left did.

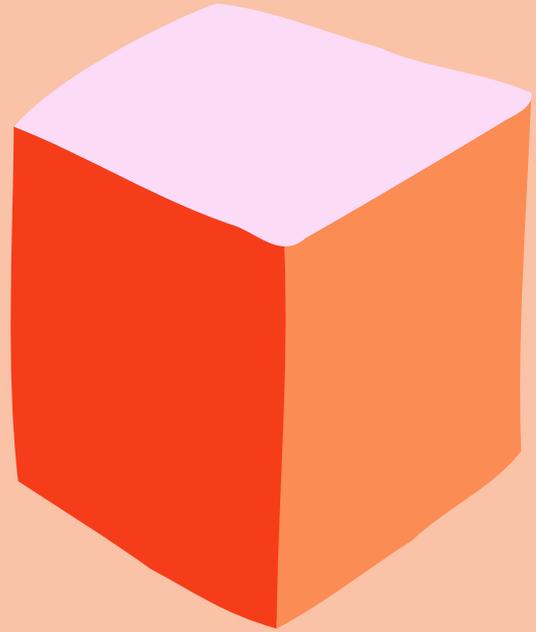


Platform Performance on the Signal by Country

There was variation by country in evaluations of platform performance. The chart below shows how superusers rated the platforms' performance in each country, controlling for age, gender, education, and ideology, from "doing poorly" (0) to "doing well" (2). In general, those in South Africa, Malaysia, Romania, and Ireland tended to say that the platforms performed better with respect to this signal than those in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and France.



Focus group report



By Gina Masullo, Ori Tenenboim,
and Martin Riedl,
Center for Media Engagement

We conducted two focus groups in each of five countries (Brazil, Germany, Malaysia, South Africa, and the United States). Please find more about the methodology [here](#). Participants were asked to reflect on their social media experiences and the proposed signals. With respect to this signal, participants made several observations. Please note that all names included are pseudonyms.

Participants acknowledged they worried a lot about the spread of false information on social media, so they agreed obtaining reliable information was an important goal.

"I think that's a really important point. I think for me, at least, out of all of these, that's one of the most important ones," said Andrew, of the U.S. "Because there's just so much information out there, and especially with

fake news, I think it's really, really important that the news that we're spreading is real and accurate."



I mean don't go spreading lies. That is a waste of everyone's time. I want to know what is actually happening when it is happening for myself.
– Charné, South African focus group participant



Well, we basically wish for a certain degree of anonymity and no limited freedom of expression. But then we also ask for regulation, moderation and filtering. But where can we start? Should human beings do this job or rather algorithms, which should regulate, moderate, and filter in order to verify the truthfulness?... I think this is a big challenge."

– Clemens, German focus group participant

Participants had mixed reactions as to whether social media platforms can actually provide reliable information effectively. Some participants thought it was social media's responsibility to ensure the reliability of content shared online, while others felt that should be left up to news outlets or individuals users.

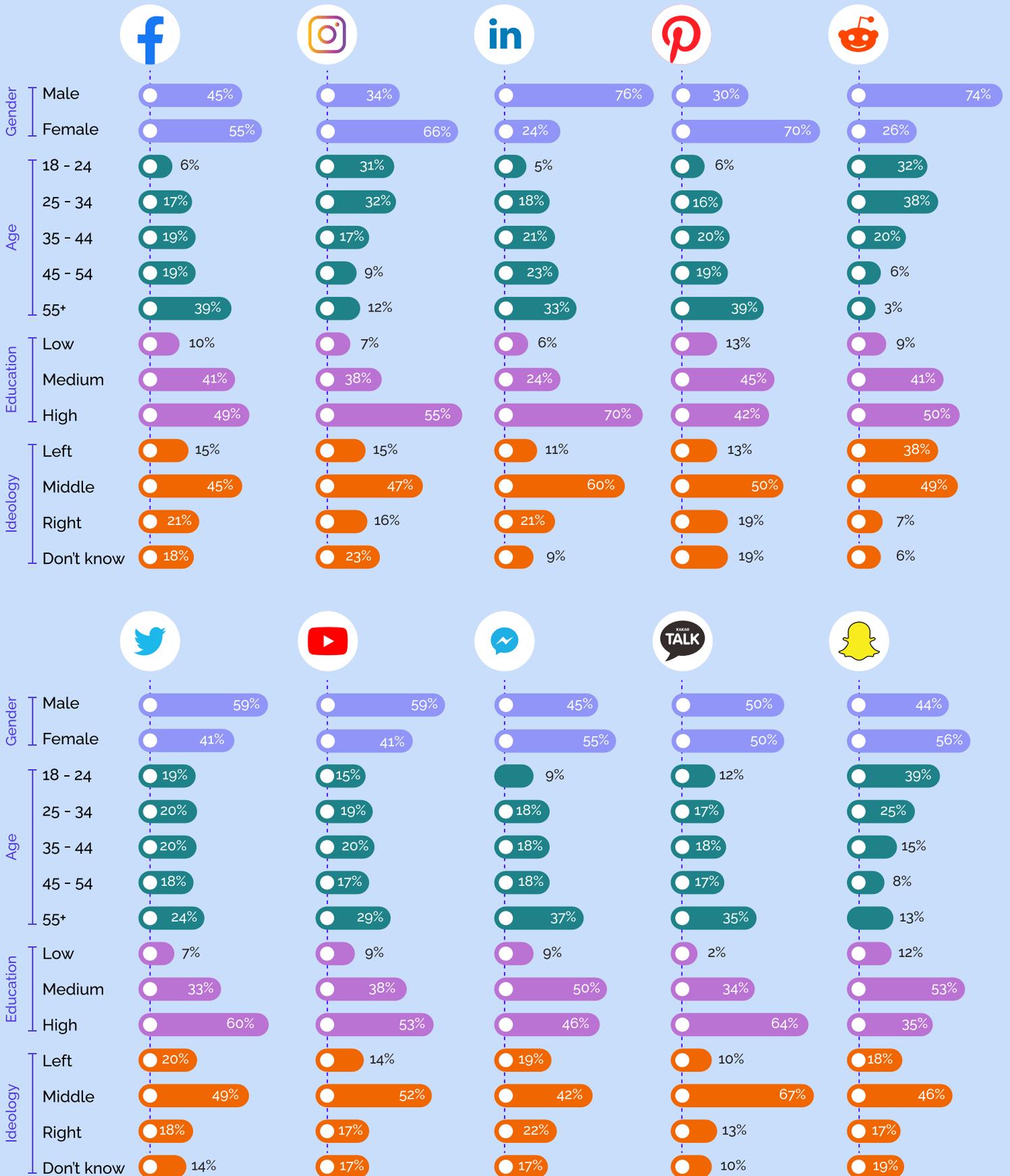
For example, Andrew, of the U.S., said "it's up to social media to make sure that all facts are checked," and Amanda, also of the U.S., felt Facebook was doing its job when it put a banner beneath a story noting the report was unconfirmed. However, Phumzile, of South Africa, expressed concern about giving social media power to determine what is reliable and what is not. "The thing about social media being given this type of power where they sort of decide on our behalf, the challenge is there is always going to be a certain amount of bias there," she said. Adriano, of Brazil, thought the power should be in the hands of users. "These days everything is manipulated. We are the ones who have to filter things and give emphasis to the right details," he remarked.

People also worried that freedom of expression might be squelched if platforms had too much power over determining what information is reliable.

Clemens, of Germany, captured the heart of this tension over ensuring reliability versus free expression: "Well, we basically wish for a certain degree of anonymity and no limited freedom of expression. But then we also ask for regulation, moderation and filtering. But where can we start? Should human beings do this job or rather algorithms, which should regulate, moderate and filter in order to verify the truthfulness? It is desirable that this happens, but I have no idea how this can be implemented so that everybody is satisfied. I think this is a big challenge."

User demographics from survey

Based on the survey respondents across all 20 countries, we looked at the demographics of superusers. For example, of those naming Facebook as their most used social media platform, 45% are male and 55% are female.





Logo glossary

Social media



Facebook



Instagram



LinkedIn



Pinterest



Reddit



Twitter



YouTube

Messaging



Facebook Messenger



KakaoTalk



Snapchat



Telegram



WhatsApp

Search engines



Bing



Google



Yahoo

