# Build civic competence

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
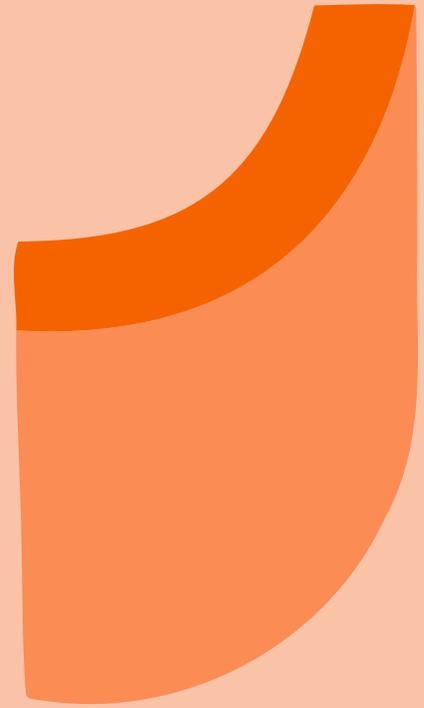
Civic competence is an awareness of how to perform one's roles in a democracy.

Why It Matters

For democracies to flourish, citizens need the ability to make good decisions, and an understanding of how to use the tools at their disposal. Civic competence encourages political participation, helps citizens build reasoned opinions, promotes democratic virtues such as political tolerance (a willingness to let others express opposing ideas), and helps citizens identify the policy choices, parties and candidates that best align with their interests.

"Social media should help by adding good things, to see if people absorb them, in an easy language. It's a win-win situation." – Jéssica, Brazilian focus group participant

Putting the Signal Into Practice

- Google and Democracy Works operate the Voting Information Project, which lists information about where to vote and what's on people's ballots. https://www.votinginfoproject.org/

- Facebook provides information on voting locations, and the platform's Candidate Info feature plays videos from federal, state and local candidates about their stances and goals: https://about.fb.com/news/2018/10/candidate-info/. More recently, the company launched a Voting Information Center, which offers information on registration and mail-in ballots, and local alerts about changes to voting processes. https://about.fb.com/news/2020/06/voting-information-center/

- Twitter posts a prompt in people's timelines with information on how to register to vote. https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/topics/company/2018/be-a-voter-2018.html

- In Ireland, the *Dublin Inquirer* surveyed readers about what issues they wanted local candidates to discuss. Then readers volunteered to solicit issue positions from candidates. https://medium.com/@azirulnick/case-study-how-the-dublin-inquirer-set-a-citizens-agenda-aa13c015097c

- At the *Los Angeles Times*, Matt Pearce fielded a survey that received 3,000 responses to questions like "What's the local issue that's most important to your community, but which you think gets overlooked by the national media?" and "How much does it matter to you who a candidate's donors are?" He planned to use respondents as sources on hyper-local issues. https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/05/assigned-to-the-2020-campaign-trail-consider-a-google-form-on-your-way-out/

Literature review
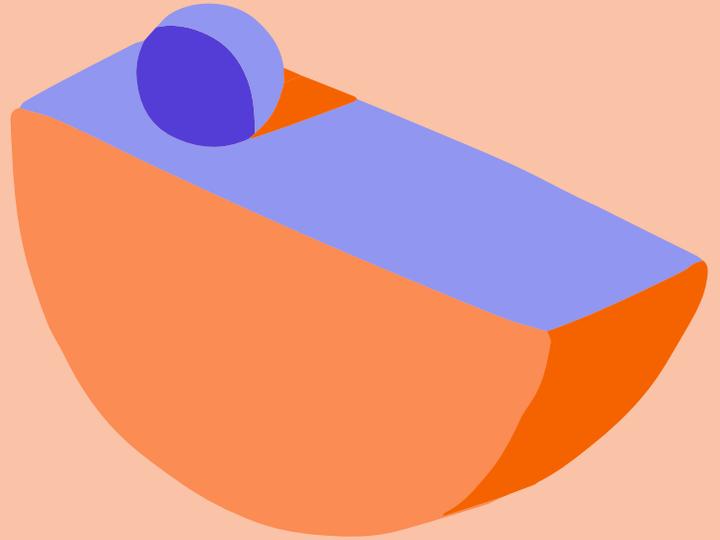
By Delaney Harness and Tamar Wilner,
Center for Media Engagement
With thanks to Dhavan Shah,
University of Wisconsin-Madison;
Arthur Lupia, University of Michigan;
Kristen Muller, Southern California
Public Radio; and Dannagal G. Young,
University of Delaware

What the Signal Is

Civic competence is an awareness of how to perform one's roles in a democracy. It requires information about relevant civic topics, such as how to vote. This definition builds on political scientist Arthur Lupia's notion that competence is "the ability to perform a task with respect to a particular criterion." *Civic* competence is a person's ability to perform duties in roles that include voter, juror, bureaucrat and legislator.

Related Concepts

Lupia, as well as other academics such as management scholar Russell Ackoff and information and business professor Jenny Rowley, have distinguished among

information, knowledge, and competence. Lupia wrote that information in the domain of civics is what civic educators – such as teachers, scientists, journalists, advocates, political campaigners, faith leaders, even friends and family members – transmit to others. Examples of information include who is running for office and how to register to vote. Knowledge consists of memories of the relationships among concepts and objects. For example, there may be a relationship between one's preferred political party and the issues emphasized by the party. Competence is the ability to complete a task in a particular fashion. If the civic task is voting, then the person must have sufficient information and knowledge in order to cast a ballot.

Knowledge requires information, and competence requires knowledge. As Lupia writes, multiple steps are required before information can be turned into competence: An educator transmits information to the audience. The audience must pay attention to the information, process the information as the educator intended, and then integrate the information into memory so that it becomes available for later use – in short, turn the information into knowledge. The knowledge must then be applied to the competence that the educator has in mind.

A note on the knowledge/competence distinction: Throughout much of this paper we refer to building or improving people's knowledge. We take this tack because knowledge is required for competence. In fact, even building knowledge is usually done indirectly – that is, by transmitting information, Lupia explained. It is therefore impossible to talk about building civic competence without grounding it in a discussion of knowledge and information.

Our focus on Civic Competence is distinct from our other signal Show Reliable Information. The latter is concerned with the quality of information on an unlimited variety of topics. The former is concerned with the ability to perform tasks relating to one's civic duties. As we will make clear, not all types of civic knowledge lead to civic competence. In this paper, we do not address building civic knowledge for its own sake, but only building the types of civic knowledge that evidence suggests will lead to civic competence. The information that contributes to such knowledge and ability must be reliable, to be sure, but it must also be actionable.

Civic competence also differs from political engagement. We take "engagement" to mean essentially the same thing as "participation." For example, a 2018 Pew Research Center study examined rates of engagement behaviors such as voting, donating to campaigns, and participating in volunteer organizations. Competence can lead to engagement, as we shall see below, but is not itself engagement.

Why It's Important

Civic competence is vital to building a thriving democracy. For democracies to flourish, citizens need the ability to make good decisions, and an understanding of how to use the tools at their disposal. As political communication scholar Michael X. Delli Carpini and political scientist Scott Keeter wrote, "All things being equal, the more informed people are, the better able they are to perform as citizens." Again, being informed is not the same as competence, but it is a required prerequisite.

Delli Carpini and Keeter showed that political knowledge has at least five demonstrable, positive outcomes. For all five of these effects, the difference between the least- and most-informed U.S. citizens are substantial. Note that our definition of competence differs from the procedural and identification forms of knowledge used by Delli Carpini and Keeter (e.g. what percentage of votes are required to overturn a presidential veto?). Our definition involves types of knowledge that are directly required in order for people to perform their civic roles. The benefits of knowledge identified by these authors, however, apply equally to our construct of civic competence.

The first positive outcome is that civic competence promotes democratic virtues such as political tolerance, or a willingness to let others express ideas with which one disagrees. Knowledge about the norms and procedures of democracy is, in fact, a necessary precondition of a tolerant public, Delli Carpini and Keeter argued. In one study, Delli Carpini and Keeter found that knowledge of civil liberties predicted tolerance much better than any other factor they looked at, including education, ideology, and political engagement.

Second, civic competence encourages active political participation, which Delli Carpini and Keeter argued is necessary for a true democracy. Participation includes not just voting, but many other activities such as working for a candidate, trying to influence the votes of others, and working to address a local community problem. It is likely that political knowledge has these effects in part because it increases political interest and efficacy, and helps people understand why politics is relevant to them. At the same time, in the words of journalism scholar James Lemert, "mobilizing information," or information on how citizens can participate politically, can lead to civic competence.

Journalism scholars Dhavan Shah, Jack McLeod and Nam-jin Lee's research adds more weight to these ideas. They found that adolescents' communication competence – a type of civic competence whereby teens are able to engage in family conversation, issue deliberation in school, news media consumption, and interpersonal discussion of news, opinions and ideas – boosted civic engagement.

Third, civic competence helps citizens build stable opinions on a variety of topics, as political scientist John Zaller has demonstrated. One needs to be informed about an issue to form opinions about it, or to react thoughtfully to the arguments of others. In this manner, a civically competent public is able to evaluate arguments from multiple sides to make an informed decision.

Delli Carpini and Keeter added that the attitudes of better-informed citizens are more internally consistent, and these citizens are less likely to change their mind based on specious or irrelevant arguments. Political scientist Robert Luskin made a similar claim, using empirical and theoretical evidence to argue that civic competence (what he terms "political sophistication") makes one less susceptible to illogical persuasive appeals, more easily persuaded by reasoned argument, and less easily swayed by candidates' personalities when it comes time to make a voting decision.

Fourth, civic competence helps citizens identify their "true interests." Some people are unable to identify the policy choices that

best align with their interests because of inaccurate beliefs they hold about policies' potential impact on them, the groups they belong to, or the public as a whole. Political knowledge helps to erase these inaccuracies.

Fifth, civic competence helps people connect attitudes with participation. More specifically, a better informed voter is more likely to vote for candidates or parties whose stated platforms match the voter's interests.

Note that the benefits of civic competence are not just individual, but collective. When individuals are better able to realize their political potential, society as a whole benefits because the various interests in a society are more equitably represented in the media, at the voting booth, and in public discussions.

For that reason it's worth noting that disparities in civic competence can exacerbate existing inequalities in society. Government professors Jennifer Jerit and Jason Barabas examined a strong body of literature showing that, in many countries around the world, women are less politically knowledgable than men. But the two researchers' experiments found that the provision of civic information can reduce or even eliminate these gender gaps.

How We Can Move the Needle

Lupia noted that competence does not require knowing everything. In fact, for many political decision-making tasks, there is no single set of facts one can point to as necessary for competence. At the same time, the

way people process information depends on what knowledge they already have. A piece of information can increase one person's competence and have no influence on another's. Improving competence may therefore require that we give different information to different people.

Key principles for effective civic education include securing audience attention by convincing people that the information confers net benefits to them, Lupia argued. For example, a climate change campaigner is better off focusing on information that's local and relevant, like the projected sea level rise in an audience's home town, instead of the impact on the polar ice caps. People perceive net benefits based on their values, the complexity of the issues, their chances of affecting political outcomes, and learning costs such as time and money.

In addition, Lupia wrote, audiences must perceive civic educators as credible sources – especially on topics where there's a lot of disagreement. A learner has greater motivation to believe a civic educator's information if she perceives that the educator wants similar outcomes from the information exchange, and that the educator knows more than she does about how to fulfill those outcomes.

Luskin found that civic competence (or "political sophistication") is influenced by an interest in politics more than by intelligence, one's level of education, one's occupation, the politicization of one's family, or exposure to political information in print media. "We learn about the things we care about," he argued. In some ways, this is encouraging because information that could lead to competence could be identified. For instance, perhaps platform companies could encourage political interest by listening more intently to

what seemingly non-political topics matter to users, and then connecting the dots to show how politics affects those issues.

Luskin's finding can be viewed as discouraging, however, given political scientist Markus Prior's finding that political interest does not change much over time. Yet there are ways to spark interest. Communication professors Michael McDevitt and Steven Chaffee found that children can boost their parents' political knowledge by discussing civic content that they learn at school. Finding channels, sources, and strategies to boost cognitive competence is key.

Efforts to improve civic competence often concentrate on making political information more easily accessible or locatable. For example, Google worked with the Pew Charitable Trusts, state governments and local officials to create the Voting Information Project, which lists information about where to vote and what's on people's ballots. (Democracy Works has since taken over management of the project from Pew.) Facebook provides information on voting locations. The platform's Candidate Info feature plays videos from federal, state and local candidates about their stances and goals. Twitter posts a prompt in people's timelines with information on how to register to vote. These features provide information that citizens can apply when they go to vote.

Other efforts work to connect civic information to people's concerns. In Ireland, the *Dublin Inquirer* surveyed readers about what issues they wanted local candidates to discuss. Then readers volunteered to solicit issue positions from candidates. At the *Los Angeles Times*, Matt Pearce fielded a survey that received 3,000 responses to questions like "What's the local issue that's most im-

portant to your community, but which you think gets overlooked by the national media?" and "How much does it matter to you who a candidate's donors are?" Examples such as these build civic competence by providing people with information on civic issues that concern them.

Platforms and media companies can also address civic competence more directly, by supplying people with the tools and information they need for civic awareness and decision-making. For example, Outlier Media gives Detroit residents the opportunity to text an address and get back information such as the number of tickets the property has been issued for blight and the amount of tax owed on the property. Recently, the service re-tooled to address questions about COVID-19 and now uses text to provide information about testing, re-opening, and jobs, among other topics.

Similarly, political reporter Mary Plummer of Pasadenia, Calif., public radio station KPCC heard voter concerns by having lunch with residents and setting up listening booths at a local restaurant and swap meet. She found that people had basic questions: What date was the election? How can a person know whether she's registered? What if someone can't get time off work to vote? KPCC then created an online and on-air voter guide to answer the questions, even doing personalized research for individual questions that listeners posed. This Human Voter Guide project received more than 900 questions and tips, and the team involved replied to every question that included contact details.

How to Measure

Lupia warned against some ways of measuring civic competence. Because much political knowledge is neither necessary nor sufficient for civic competence, recall questions in surveys (such as "Which battle brought the American Revolution to an end?") are often a poor way to judge competence. Even more seemingly relevant questions ("What office does John Roberts hold?") can constitute flawed items if they are not connected to a particular civic act. These questions can also be problematic if they are graded too strictly, as political scientists James Gibson and Gregory Caldeira found to be the case in one large survey. It's also often misleading to combine various recall questions into an index and propose that this measures "political knowledge," given the universe of possible questions one could ask, Lupia argues. Primarily, these sorts of questions may get at textbook knowledge, but may not be adequate for assessing whether people can carry out their duties as citizens.

Communication scholar Lee Shaker provided another warning about common measures of civic competence: Many only truly measure *national* political competence. Shaker's research shows that one's scores on measures of national and local civic competence can be quite different, and those evaluating competence must use the right tool for their desired aim.

It is possible to construct a scale of political knowledge that would tell us something about a person's related competencies, however. Drawing on Lupia, we argue that researchers should follow these steps: First, identify the tasks that require civic competence, such as casting a ballot. Next, determine the types of knowledge and information that would be necessary for many citizens to have the particular civic competence. Then, identify what individual measures are necessary, and what are sufficient, for the overall index. Finally, use the knowledge definition to write justifications for the inclusion and weighting of each individual measure.

Social scientist Bryony Hoskins and colleagues developed the civic competence composite indicator-2 (CCCI-2), based on questions asked in the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. CCCI-2 features four dimensions, including one that measures the knowledge and skills required for participation in democracy (the other dimensions have to do with values and attitudes). Questions in this dimension include multiple-choice items, such as "What is the main purpose of labor unions?," as well as more elaborate questions involving scenarios that must be interpreted, and open-ended questions ("How can public debate benefit society?"). Based on Lupia's work, these questions could be appropriate measures for certain types of civic competence.

Platforms can work to identify the type of knowledge necessary for people to perform their duties as citizens (and other democratically-relevant roles) and then design products that attract attention and promote information and knowledge gain.
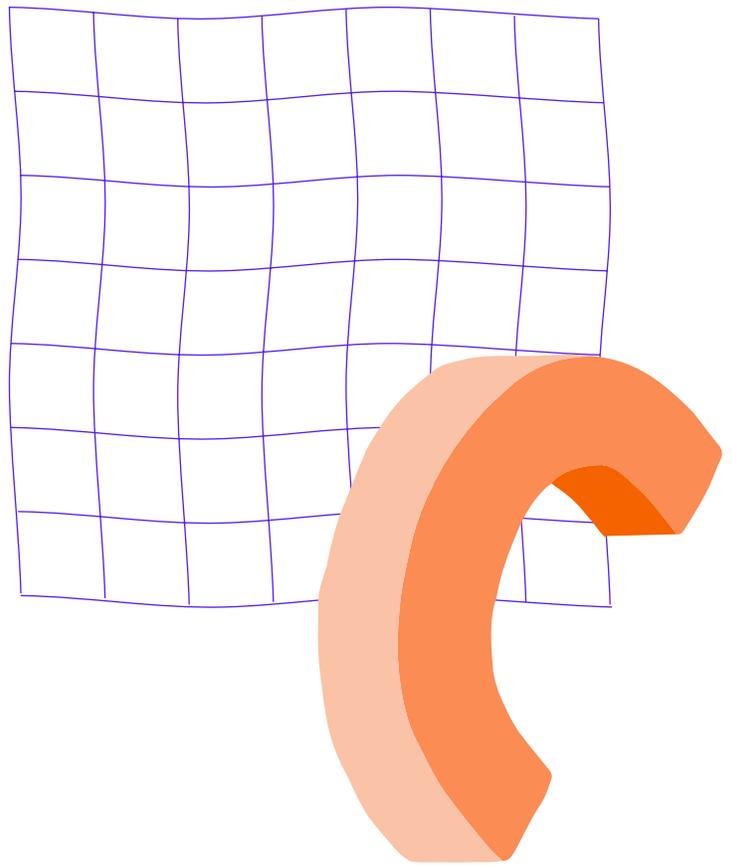
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Expert Q&A
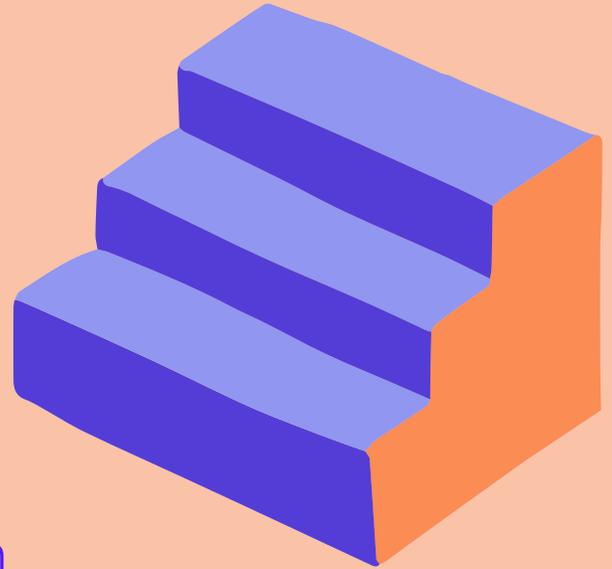
Three key questions with
Jennifer Jerit, Dartmouth College
and **Arthur Lupia**, University of Michigan

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

Jerit: Civic competence is defined broadly as an awareness of how to perform one's role in a democracy. I believe that this kind of awareness can motivate people to behave differently in their daily lives. It is unrealistic to think citizens will engage in time consuming behaviors simply because they are good for society. People have immediate concerns (e.g., school, career, family) that consume their time and effort. But competence can impart a sense of duty that motivates people to engage in the costly activities of citizenship, which might entail learning about the voting process

in one's area, researching the differences between candidates, and making the effort to consider multiple viewpoints.

Civic competence (or awareness) promotes accountability. In the most basic sense, citizens cannot hold their elected representatives accountable if they are unaware of what the government is doing. As the saying goes, "Knowledge is power." But ordinary life involves many situations where people must cooperate for the common good (e.g., water conservation in a drought, modifying personal behaviors in a public health crisis, reducing consumption of certain kinds of resources). In these cases, awareness will help citizens recognize that

better collective outcomes can be achieved through cooperation, and they will hold one another accountable.

Lupia: Civic competence provides us with opportunities to learn more about the people, history, and institutions around us. It provides a broader and stronger foundation for discovering shared interests. It offers us a way to see beyond stereotypes and towards new ways that we can work together to improve quality of life for our families, communities, and nations.

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?

Jerit: It is hard to state what "perfect" looks like for anything, so I will settle for "better." I think we can do better (in terms of social media, message, and web search platforms) by recognizing that all information is *not* equal. Some statements or bits of information have grounding in science and the activities of experts, some are more contested (in that the science is evolving), and others have no basis in science whatsoever. A better social media/web platform would help people recognize these differences while still exposing them to diverse views. This is vital because the information people encounter on these platforms supply the raw materials—the ingredients, so to speak—of their beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral intentions.

Lupia: When answering your question, I am going to stay away from easy answers that include magically eliminating darker aspects of human behavior. To operate at any scale, the new social media would have to be financed. So let's talk about that. From a financial perspective, an alternate social media would be based on a business model that focuses on credibility rather than attention. Today's social media is a massive battle for attention. Outrage, salaciousness, and controversy draw more eyeballs and clicks than sincere attempts to understand how to live together more effectively. Social media that focuses on community service, or other ways of serving others, would incentivize accountability instead of the ability to attract attention. This social media might not have the breadth that it has now, but such a venue would be a welcome relief to millions of people who want a constructive alternative to what we have now.

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

Jerit: Politics *invites* disagreement and contestation. That's because there is no single correct way to vote and there is no single right position on issues. But if a messaging, social media, or web search platform is "doing its job," then ideally people's beliefs about the political world should be more in alignment with ground truth after using it. Another benchmark might be the degree to which people become aware of other's perspectives. Finally, these platforms are more valuable to the degree that they motivate users to embrace their role in a democracy (i.e., making them willing to bear the "costs" of citizenship). All three ideas are somewhat lofty, so it is vital to link the efforts of organizations such as Civic Signals to specific interventions that have measurable outcomes. The ideas for creating a vibrant digital public need to be subject to the same level of interrogation (and scientific processes) that we expect from the information that appears on these platforms.

Lupia: I think of civic competence as a means rather than an end. So, I would pose a set of questions—some small, some huge—and then evaluate the extent to which social media helps us answer these questions and then act on them more effectively. Civic competence that improves quality of life is the goal.

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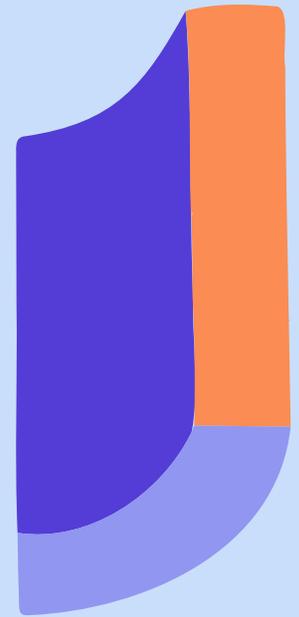
By Jay Jennings, Taeyoung Lee, Tamar Wilner, and Talia Stroud, Center for Media Engagement

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 "help people become informed citizens," 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.

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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; You-Tube = 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. For YouTube superusers in Japan and Malaysia, and Google superusers in Brazil, this was the most important of all 14 signals.

Importance ranking: Build civic competence

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.
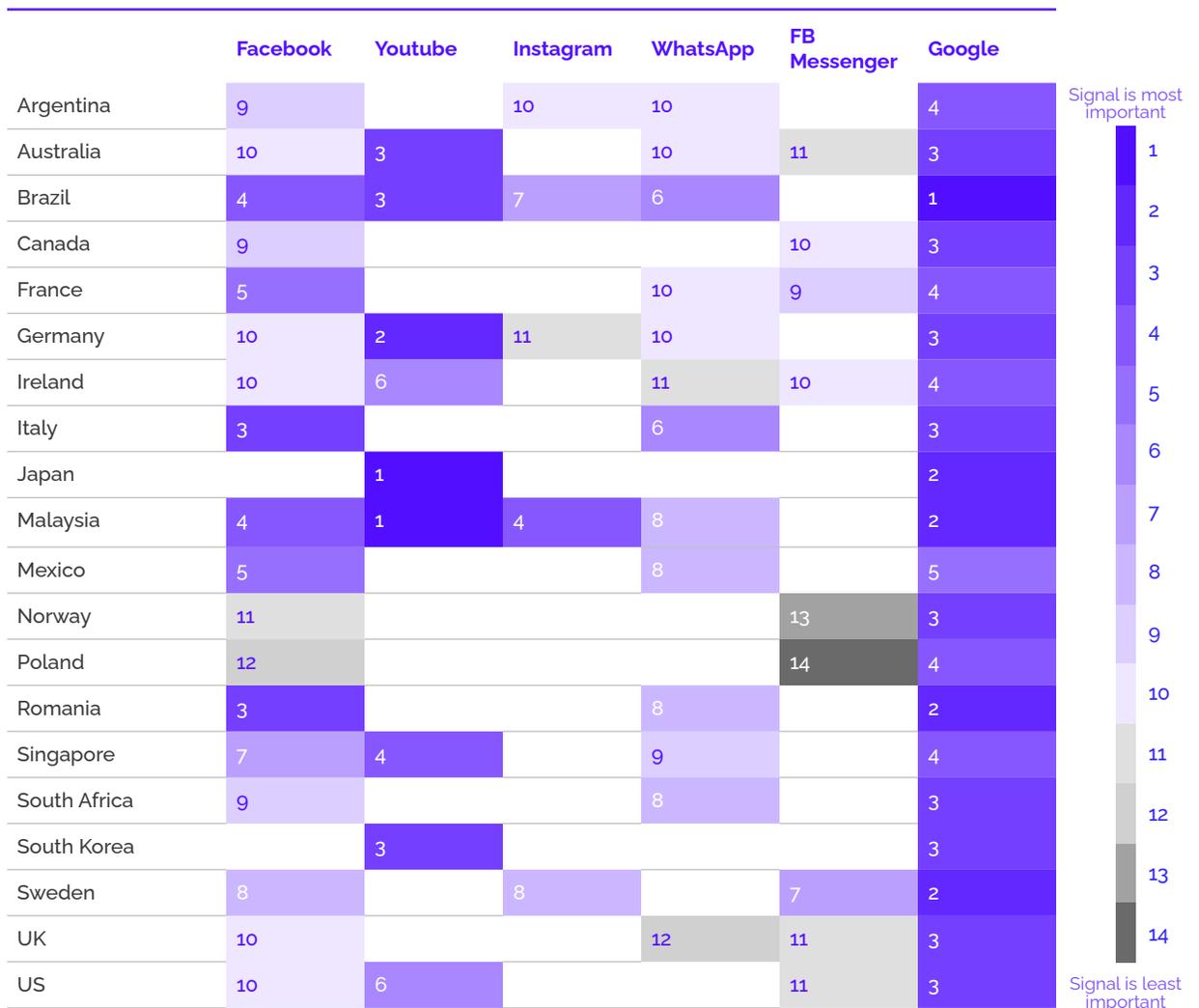
	Facebook	Youtube	Instagram	WhatsApp	FB Messenger	Google
Argentina	9		10	10		4
Australia	10	3		10	11	3
Brazil	4	3	7	6		1
Canada	9				10	3
France	5			10	9	4
Germany	10	2	11	10		3
Ireland	10	6		11	10	4
Italy	3			6		3
Japan		1				2
Malaysia	4	1	4	8		2
Mexico	5			8		5
Norway	11				13	3
Poland	12				14	4
Romania	3			8		2
Singapore	7	4		9		4
South Africa	9			8		3
South Korea		3				3
Sweden	8		8		7	2
UK	10			12	11	3
US	10	6			11	3

Signal is most important
1
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14
Signal is least important

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 Age[2]

Age predicted whether superusers thought it was important to "help people become informed citizens" for four platforms: Google, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. For Google, the oldest group (55+) and the youngest group (18-24) were the most likely to say this signal was important. For Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, younger groups were less likely to say building civic competence was important than older groups.

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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).

Legend:
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55+

Y-axis: Probability of saying signal is important
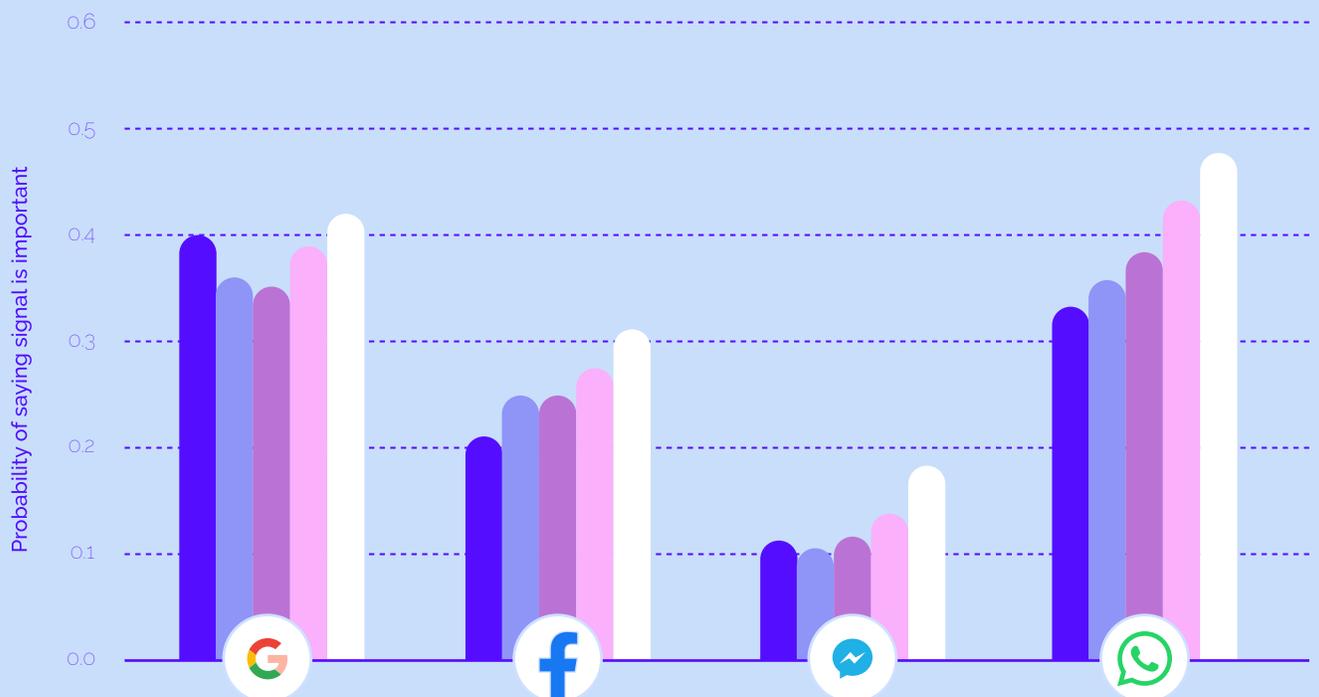
Importance of the Signal by Gender

For Google, Facebook, and WhatsApp, men and women differed in the importance they ascribed to building civic competence. Women were more likely than men to say this was important for Google, but for Facebook and WhatsApp, men were more likely than women to say it was important.

Probability of saying signal is important

- Female
- Male
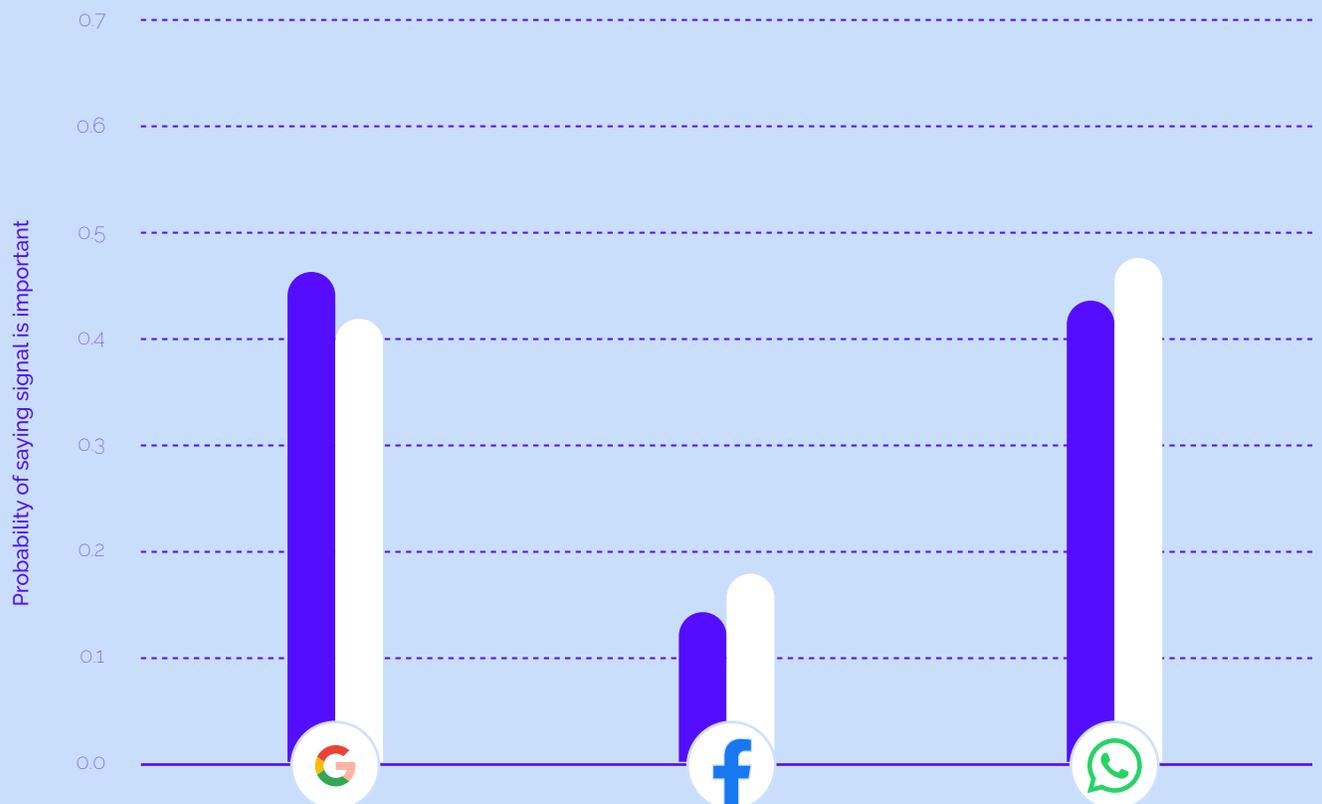
Importance of the Signal by Education

Superusers' view of the importance of building civic competence differed by education levels for Google, Facebook, and Facebook Messenger. For Google and Facebook, those with lower education levels were less likely to say this signal was important than those with higher education levels. For Facebook Messenger, those with higher education levels were less likely than those with medium education levels to say building civic competence was important.

- Low
- Medium
- High

Probability of saying signal is important

0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0.0
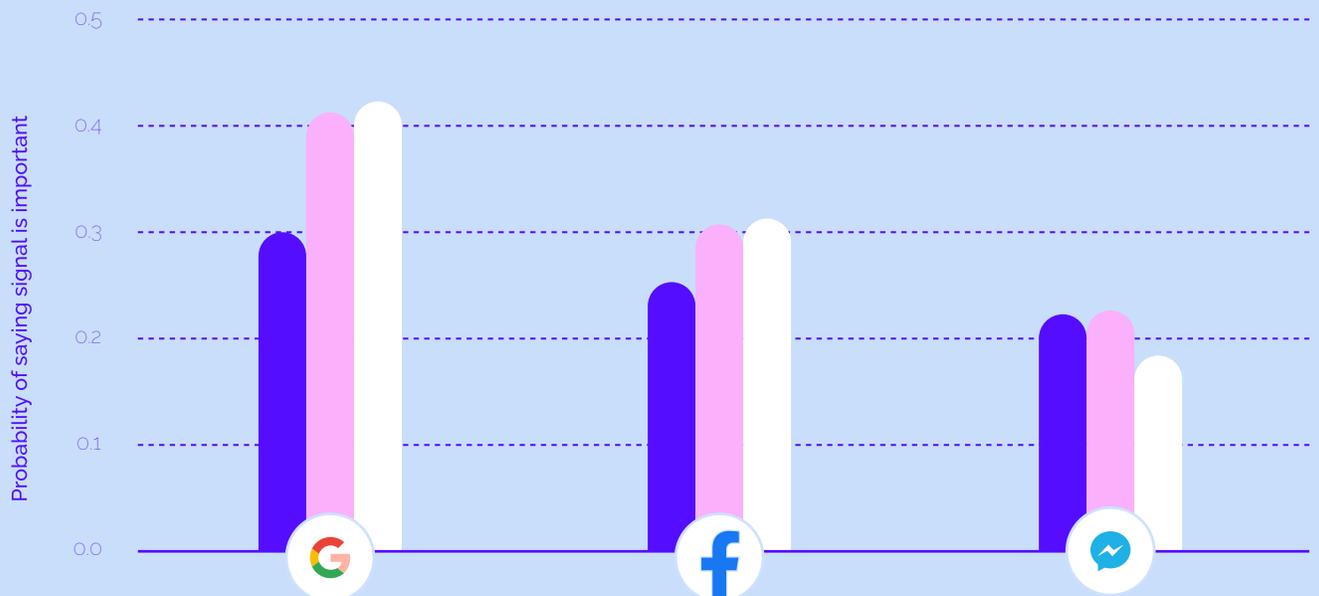
Importance of the Signal by Ideology[3]

There were differences across political ideology in those who say it is important to "help people become informed citizens" for all five platforms. For Google, Facebook, and YouTube those on the left were more likely to say that the signal was important with those with other ideologies. For Google, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, those who didn't know their ideology were less likely to say that the signal was important compared to all other ideologies. For Google, those in the middle were also more likely to say that the signal was important compared to those on the right. For Facebook Messenger, those on the left were more likely to say that the signal was important compared to those on the right or who didn't know their ideology. For WhatsApp, those on the right were more likely than those in the middle to say that the signal was important.

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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").
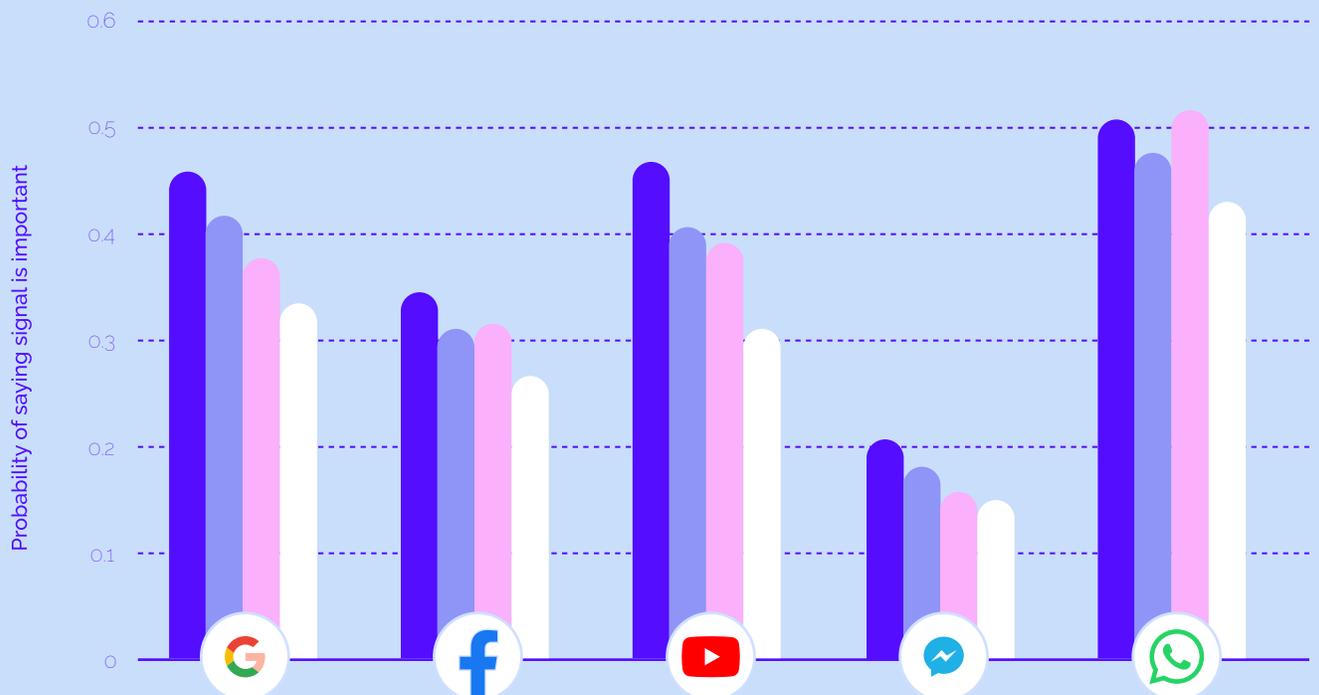
Importance of the Signal by Country

There was significant variation by country for all five of the platforms we examined based on how important superusers thought it was to "help people become informed citizens." The chart below shows the probability of saying that the signal is important by platform and by country. Overall, survey respondents in Romania, South Africa, Brazil, and Malaysia were the most likely to say this signal was important. Norway, Germany, and Poland were the least likely to say this was important.

Understand: Build civic competence
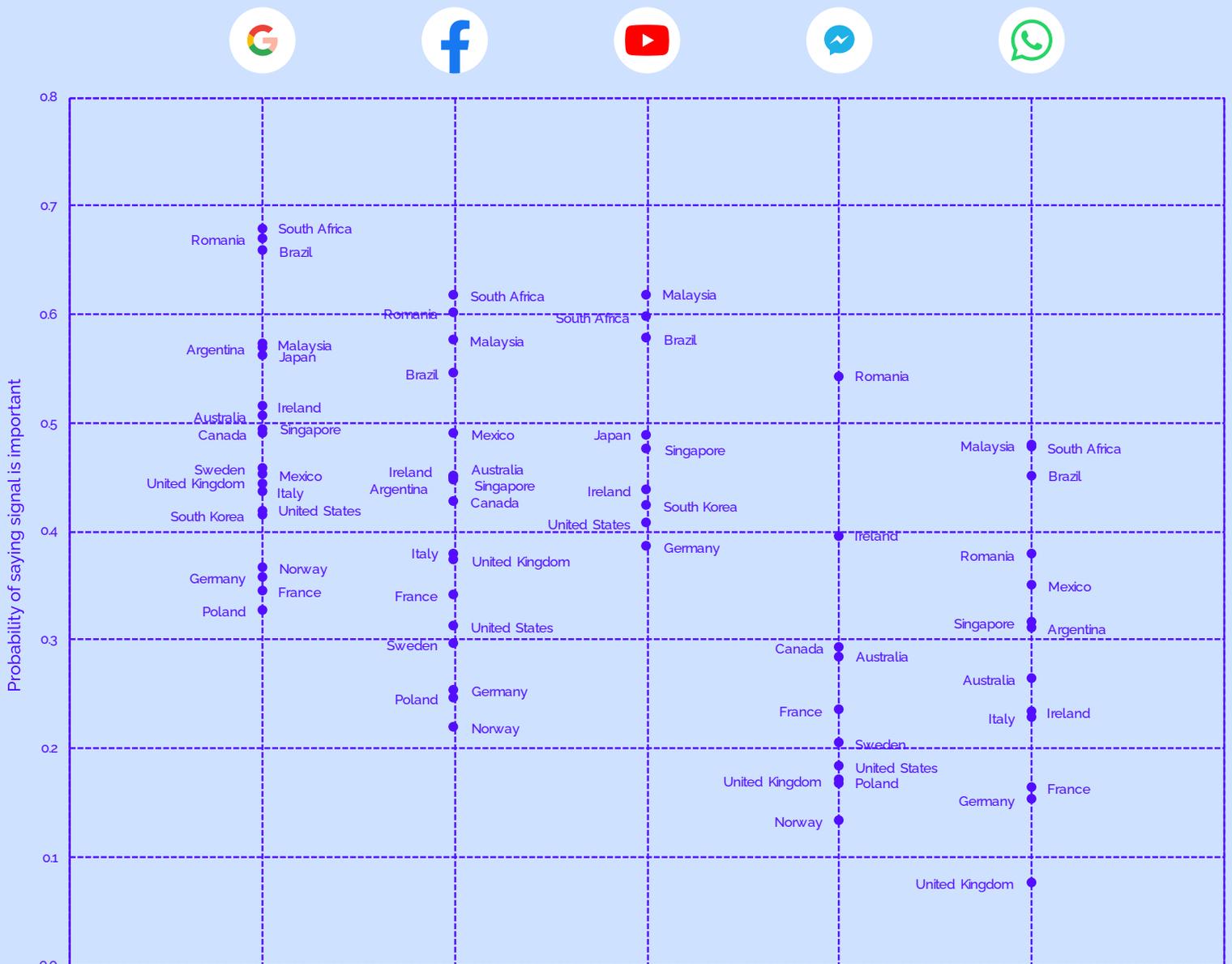
Platform Performance on the Signal

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. Most platforms in most countries performed neutral or better on this signal. Google performed particularly well, while WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger did not perform quite as well.

Performance index: Build civic competence

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.

	Facebook	Youtube	Instagram	WhatsApp	FB Messenger	Google
Argentina	1.1		1.1	1.1		1.3
Australia	1.1	1.2		1.0	1.0	1.3
Brazil	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3		1.5
Canada	1.0				1.0	1.3
France	1.0			1.0	1.0	1.1
Germany	1.0	1.2	1.0	1.0		1.2
Ireland	1.1	1.2		1.0	1.1	1.3
Italy	1.0			1.0		1.2
Japan		1.4				1.5
Malaysia	1.3	1.4	1.2	1.2		1.4
Mexico	1.2			1.0		1.3
Norway	0.9				0.9	1.1
Poland	1.1				1.0	1.1
Romania	1.3			1.1	1.2	1.5
Singapore	1.2	1.3		1.1		1.3
South Africa	1.3			1.1		1.5
South Korea		1.3				1.3
Sweden	1.1		1.1		1.0	1.3
UK	1.0			1.0	0.9	1.2
US	1.0	1.1			0.9	1.2

Well 2.0 / 1.8 / 1.6 / 1.4 / 1.2 / 1.0 / 0.8 / 0.6 / 0.4 / 0.2 / 0 Poor

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 Age[4]

For all five platforms, the responses about performance in building civic competence differed by age. In all cases, superusers 55 years of age and older rated the platform as performing better than did those who were younger.

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).

Legend:
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55+

Y-axis: Evaluation of platform on signal (from doing poorly=0, to doing well=2)
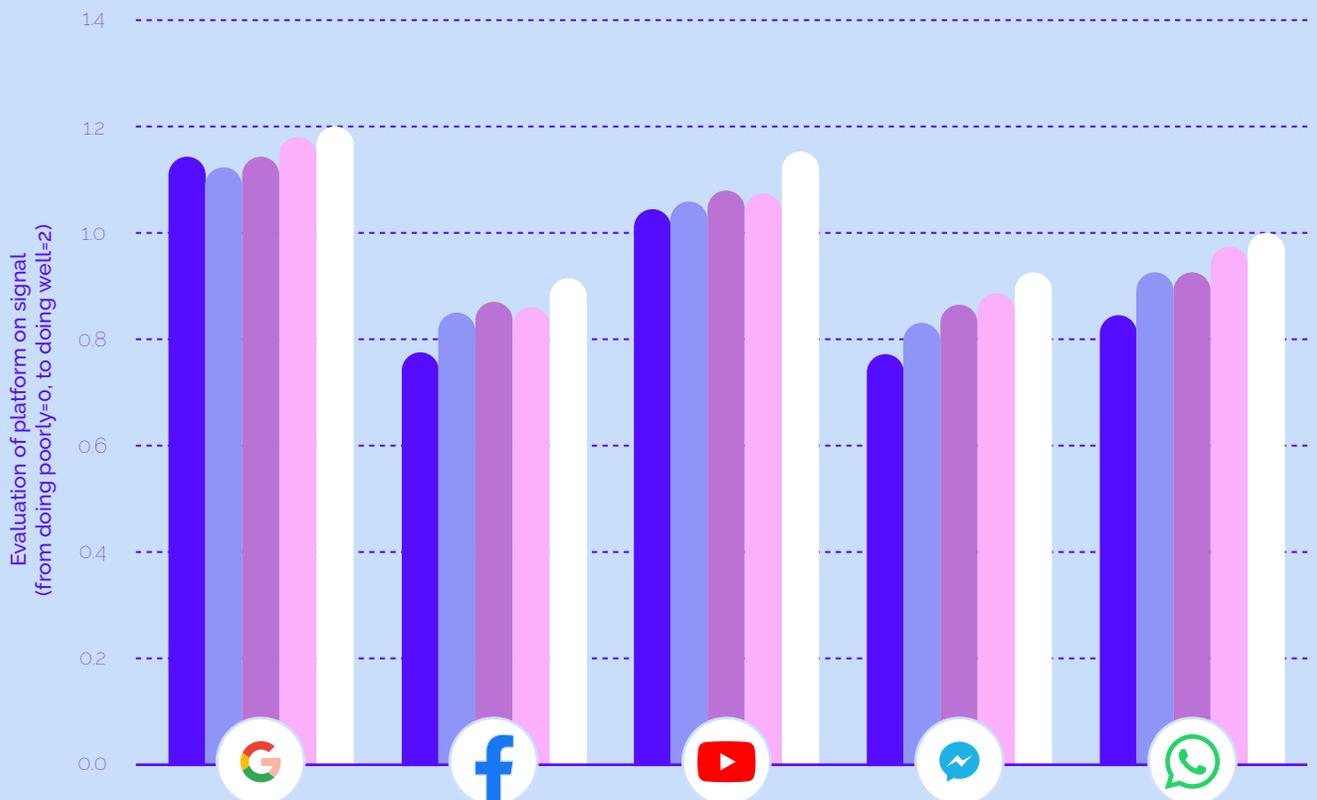
Platform Performance on the Signal by Gender

For Google, Facebook, and YouTube, women rated the platforms' performance on "help people become informed citizens" better than did men.

Evaluation of platform on signal
(from doing poorly=0, to doing well=2)

- ● Female
- ○ Male

13
12
11
1.0
0.9
0.8
0.7
0.6
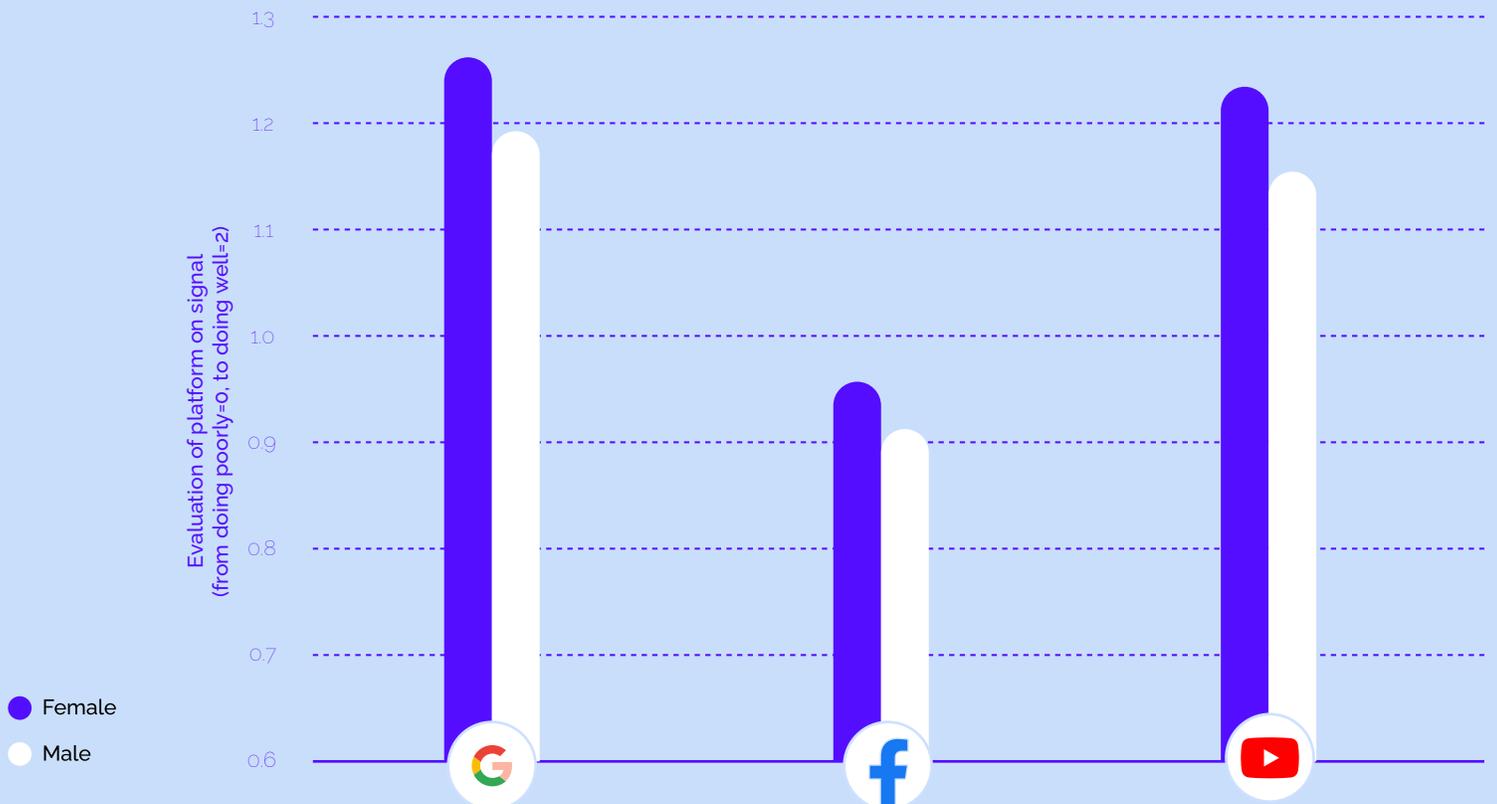
Platform Performance on the Signal by Education

For Google, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, superuser responses rating the platforms' performance on "help people become informed citizens" differed by education levels. For Google, those with lower level of education gave a lower performance rating for this signal than those with higher educational levels. For Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, those with lower education levels gave the highest performance ratings and those with the highest level of education gave the lowest performance ratings for building civic competence.

Evaluation of platform on signal (from doing poorly=0, to doing well=2)

Legend:
- Low
- Medium
- High
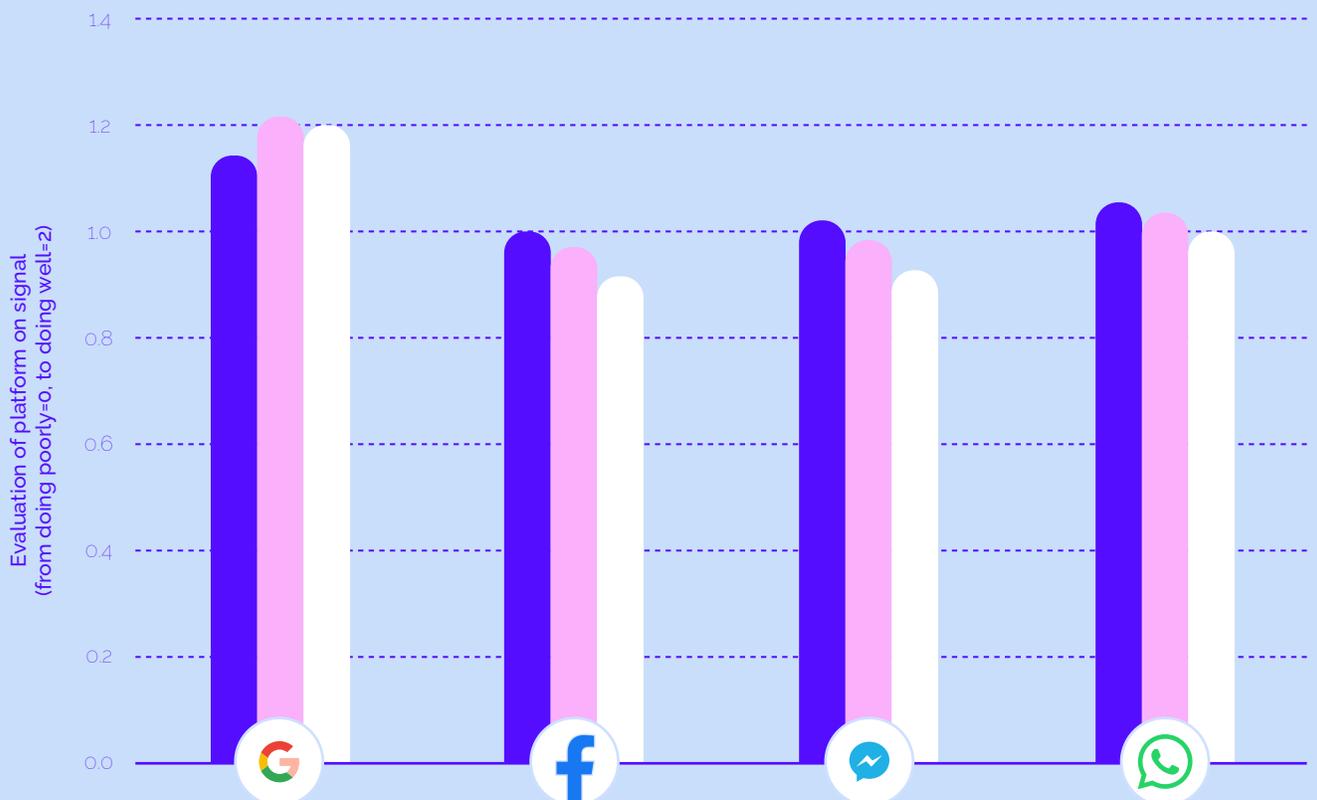
Platform Performance on the Signal by Ideology

For Google, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, responses differed by political ideology for platform performance on the building civic competence signal. For Google, those in the middle gave higher ratings for signal performance than those who didn't know their ideology. For Facebook, those on the political left gave the lowest performance ratings and those on the right gave the highest performance ratings for building civic competence. For Facebook Messenger, those on the right gave better ratings than those on the left, and those who didn't know their ideology gave better ratings than those on the left and those in the middle. For WhatsApp, those on the right rated the platform's performance more positively than those with other ideologies and those in the middle rated the platform higher than those on the left.
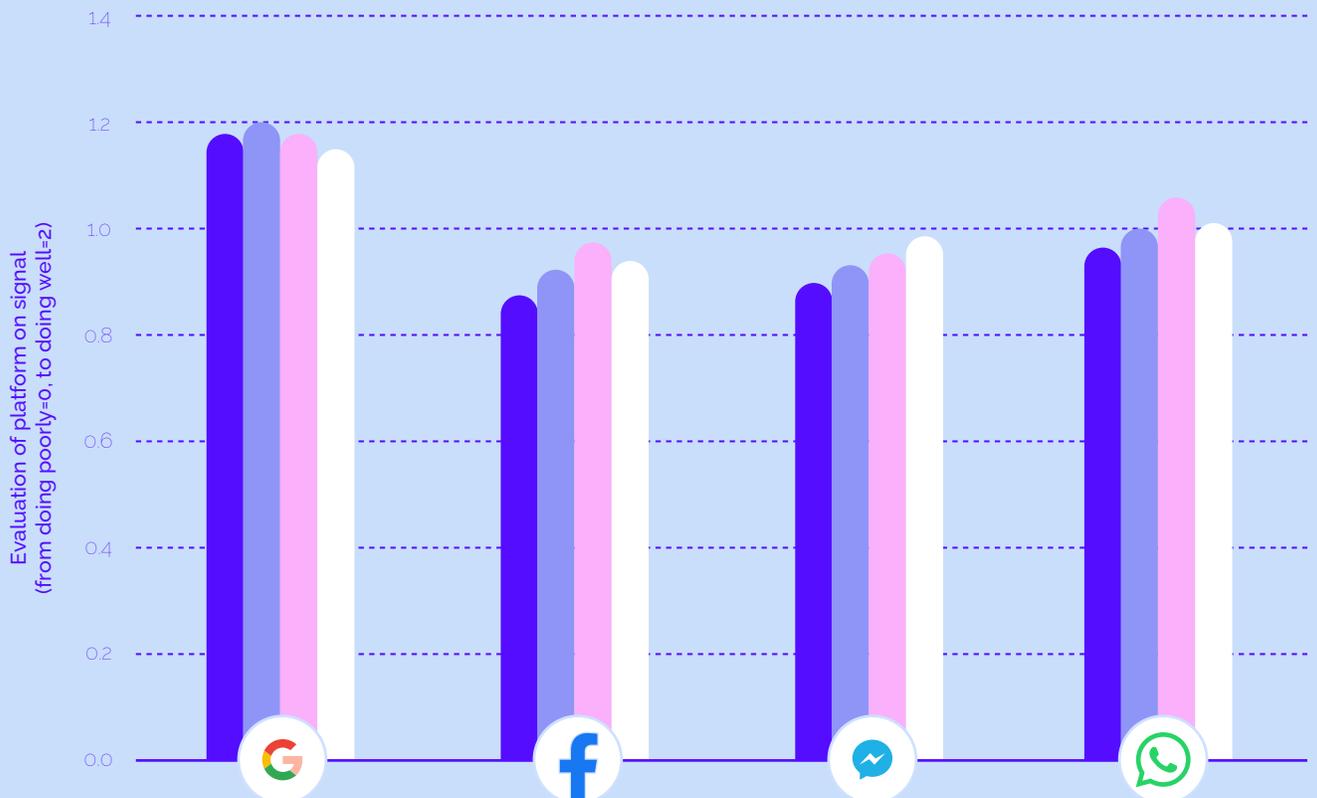
Platform Performance on the Signal by Country

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 Brazil tended to say that the platforms performed well while those in Norway and the United Kingdom thought they performed poorly.
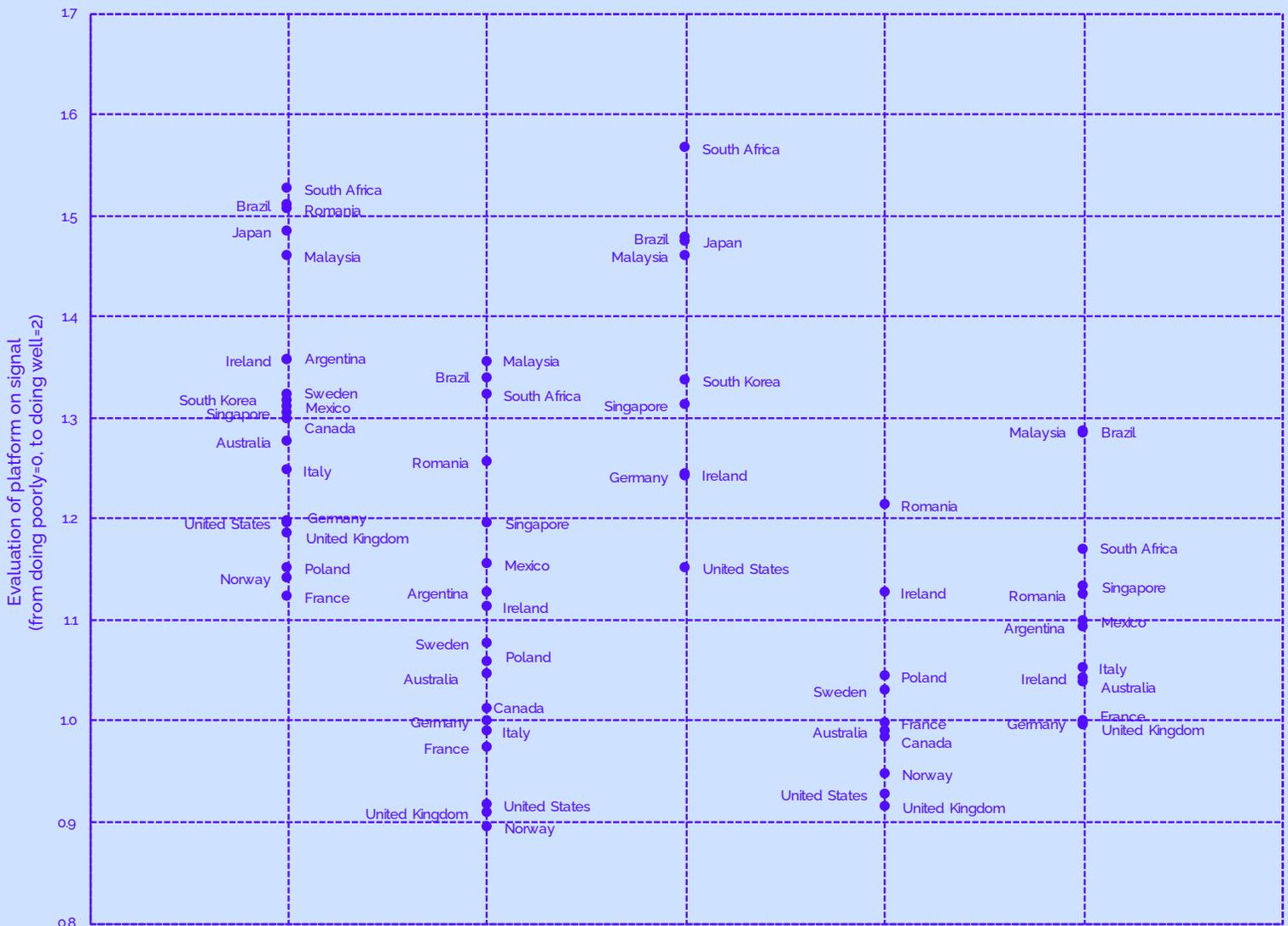
Focus group report
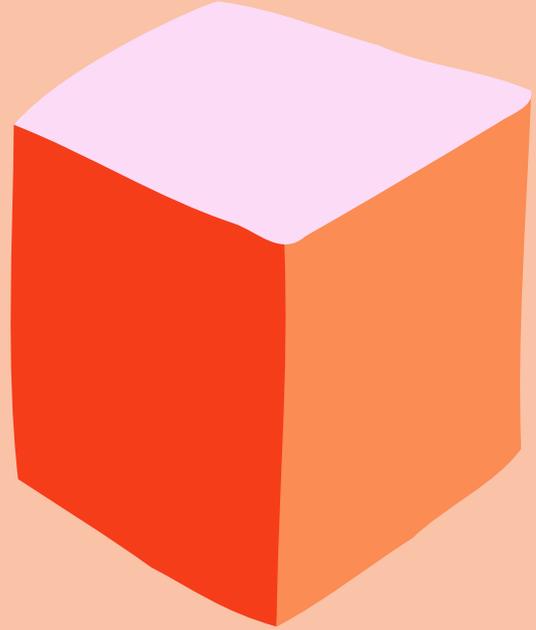
By Gina Masullo, Ori Tenenboim, and Martin Riedl,
Center for Media Engagement

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 across the countries struggled with what this category means and offered different interpretations. Many thought that building civic competence was a positive goal, but some felt that it was not the job of platforms.

Some participants interpreted building civic competence as providing information needed to be active citizens (e.g., letting people know when an election was scheduled). Others speculated it was about how people behave toward each other. Still others defined it more

> " *I think it's a good thing. But, again, it's kind of give the people tools and then it's up to them if they build on it or not." – Tracy, U.S. focus group participant*

> **" *There should be a building of civic competence… through using social media and empowering people with the right type of information so that they become informed citizens and become competent citizens for them to make informed decisions. That is how I interpret it."*
> *– Phumzile, South African focus group participant***

broadly. "It's about knowing who you are in the world… having your attitude towards things," Natalia, of Brazil noted. "[It] means that you help each other," explained Yusuf, of Germany.

Phumzile, of South Africa, offered an interpretation of civic competence that helped the rest of her focus group understand the concept: "There should be a building of civic competence … through using social media and empowering people with the right type of information so that they become informed citizens and become competent citizens for them to make informed decisions. That is how I interpret it."

Once they came to an understanding of the concept, participants suggested ways in which civic competence can be built through social media. These ideas included giving information about voting or other civic issues in different languages or formats (such as through audio) so they could be accessible to the most people. "Social media

should help by adding good things, to see if people absorb them, in an easy language. It's a win-win situation," noted Jéssica, of Brazil.

Although civic competence was generally perceived as positive, some participants, particularly in the U.S., emphasized that building it was up to users, not platforms. "I think it's a good thing. But, again, it's kind of give the people tools and then it's up to them if they build on it or not," said Tracy. "… It's giving people the information and if they use it or not, that's on them."

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.

First row

		Facebook	Instagram	LinkedIn	Pinterest	Reddit
Gender	Male	45%	34%	76%	30%	74%
	Female	55%	66%	24%	70%	26%
Age	18 – 24	6%	31%	5%	6%	32%
	25 – 34	17%	32%	18%	16%	38%
	35 – 44	19%	17%	21%	20%	20%
	45 – 54	19%	9%	23%	19%	6%
	55+	39%	12%	33%	39%	3%
Education	Low	10%	7%	6%	13%	9%
	Medium	41%	38%	24%	45%	41%
	High	49%	55%	70%	42%	50%
Ideology	Left	15%	15%	11%	13%	38%
	Middle	45%	47%	60%	50%	49%
	Right	21%	16%	21%	19%	7%
	Don't know	18%	23%	9%	19%	6%

Second row

		Twitter	YouTube	Messenger	KakaoTalk	Snapchat
Gender	Male	59%	59%	45%	50%	44%
	Female	41%	41%	55%	50%	56%
Age	18 – 24	19%	15%	9%	12%	39%
	25 – 34	20%	19%	18%	17%	25%
	35 – 44	20%	20%	18%	18%	15%
	45 – 54	18%	17%	18%	17%	8%
	55+	24%	29%	37%	35%	13%
Education	Low	7%	9%	9%	2%	12%
	Medium	33%	38%	50%	34%	53%
	High	60%	53%	46%	64%	35%
Ideology	Left	20%	14%	19%	10%	18%
	Middle	49%	52%	42%	67%	46%
	Right	18%	17%	22%	13%	17%
	Don't know	14%	17%	17%	10%	19%

Understand: Build civic competence

		Telegram	WhatsApp	Bing	Google	Yahoo
Gender	Male	60%	47%	64%	48%	44%
	Female	40%	53%	36%	52%	58%
Age	18 - 24	21%	13%	10%	13%	5%
	25 - 34	33%	21%	19%	19%	11%
	35 - 44	18%	20%	14%	19%	15%
	45 - 54	15%	17%	16%	17%	17%
	55+	13%	29%	41%	32%	52%
Education	Low	11%	10%	12%	10%	8%
	Medium	31%	35%	38%	39%	36%
	High	58%	55%	39%	51%	56%
Ideology	Left	14%	14%	14%	16%	9%
	Middle	53%	49%	51%	48%	50%
	Right	18%	18%	38%	18%	19%
	Don't know	14%	19%	7%	18%	22%

Logo glossary

Social media

Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

Pinterest

Reddit

Twitter

YouTube

Messaging

Facebook Messenger

KakaoTalk

Snapchat

Telegram

WhatsApp

Search engines

Bing

Google

Yahoo

Civic Signals