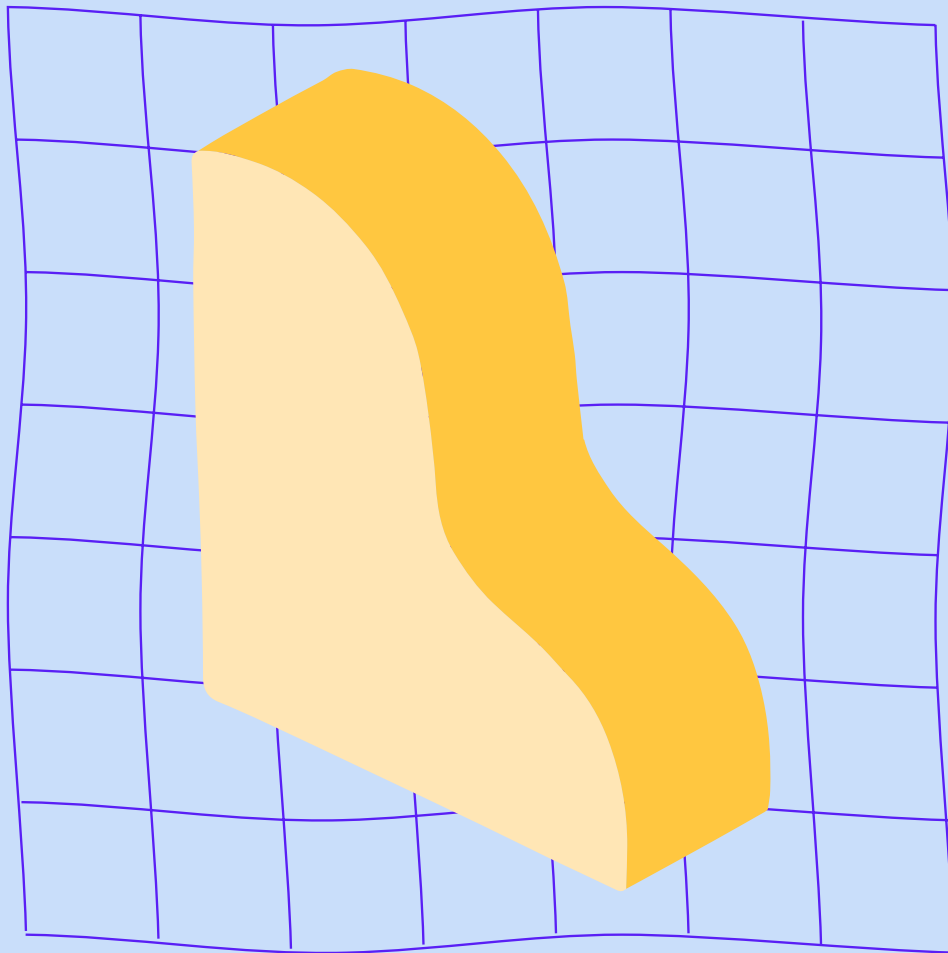


Promote thoughtful conversation



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



Thoughtful conversation is a type of exchange across lines of difference, in which people shed light on the reasoning behind their thoughts, and they are receptive to and consider the perspectives of others.

Why It Matters

Thoughtful conversation leads to a more informed public; boosts civic engagement; encourages respect, tolerance, and cooperation between opposing groups; increases a decision's legitimacy in the eyes of the public; and brings all citizens into the creation of public policy in a meaningful way. Moreover, deliberative exchanges can be seen as themselves an important form of democratic participation and an indicator of democratic health.



People look for reflection [on social media] too, sometimes. They're going through problems, so they'll look for something related to that on social media." – Ivo, Brazilian focus group participant

Putting the Signal Into Practice

- Deliberative polling, conceived by political communication researcher James Fishkin, is a process that allows citizens to participate in small-group discussions and consult with experts with the goal of generating more reflective public opinion. Case studies and a one-page summary, in several languages, are available here: <https://cdd.stanford.edu/what-is-deliberative-polling/>
- The design of a platform has a strong influence on the kind of conversations that take place there. Features like pre-moderation of messages and threaded replies can help, political communications researchers Scott Wright and John Street say. <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/san/waysofbeing/data/citizenship-robson-wright-2007b.pdf>
- The Ceasefire website requires that users provide the reasoning behind their point of view, which they must truly hold and must truly be open to changing. Replies must be substantive, and hostile comments are barred. The website also allows users to flag compelling arguments that changed their outlook. These flagged arguments are then highlighted to other users as posts that are particularly compelling. <https://ceasefire.net/>
- ParticipateDB is a website that collects examples of digital engagement, including many deliberative dialogue case studies. <http://www.participatedb.com/projects>
- The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation offers a beginner's guide and more useful material in its Resource Guide on Public Engagement. <http://ncdd.org/rc/what-are-dd/>

Literature review



By Caroline Murray,
Center for Media Engagement
With thanks to Jennifer Stromer-Galley,
Syracuse University

What the Signal Is

Conversation is how we listen to and communicate ideas. A thoughtful conversation is deliberative, which means that people don't just declare their opinions, they shed light on the reasoning behind their thoughts, and, equally important, they are receptive to and consider the perspectives of others.

Political scientist Simone Chambers wrote that deliberation is "debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants." Although reaching

a consensus is ideal in Chambers' view, it is not a requirement.

Several theorists have argued that the tenets of deliberation are too idealistic to be implemented in reality. For example, imbalances of social and political power can prevent every kind of individual from having an equal opportunity to participate in the conversation, as is required in many definitions of deliberation. For this reason, political communication researchers like James Fishkin and John Gastil have acknowledged that when people design and evaluate moments for thoughtful conversation in the real world, not every of tenet of deliberation will be met in every circumstance.

Despite disagreement among theorists, political communication professor Diana Mutz argued that the most essential component of deliberation is that people be exposed to opposing political perspectives through dialogue, what she calls “cross-cutting exposure.” Communication across lines of difference is the *raison d’être* of deliberation or thoughtful conversation.

When it comes to “cross-cutting exposure,” the goal is not to convince a group or individual to adopt like-minded views, or to reach a politically actionable consensus. Instead, the goal is for people to see that the opinions held by others that are different from one’s own are legitimate, and grounded in reasons and world-views that make sense to those people.

Related Concepts

We focus on the literature about deliberation rather than dialogue in this overview. The two concepts are closely related, but not all dialogue can be considered deliberative. The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation notes that dialogue, or talking about one’s experiences with others to foster understanding, is often a foundation of deliberative conversations. However, deliberation also emphasizes the exploration of all parties’ perspectives and critical examination of the points made. This deep, extensive process of deliberation more closely captures the concept of thoughtful conversation.

We also chose to focus on deliberation rather than the concept of critical rationalism. Critical rationalism involves the rigorous scrutiny and testing of claims and

ideas. However, as sociologist Nicole Curato and political researchers John Dryzek, Selen Ercan, Carolyn Hendricks and Simon Niemeyer noted in their review of deliberative democracy research, political theorists have increasingly expanded the definition of a deliberative system to include emotional appeals and informal elements of conversation, like personal narratives and humor. We contend thoughtful conversation as it appears in reality would also include these more informal elements, making it a better fit than critical rationalism.

Two Civic Signals that may seem similar to Thoughtful Conversation are [Build Bridges Between Groups](#) and [Encourage the Humanization of Others](#). The former is about ties between people in different networks, while the latter is about seeing others as human beings, despite differences. Thoughtful conversation may lead to these two outcomes, or even be an outcome of them, but we maintain that it is a distinct signal. For example, while [Build Bridges Between Groups](#) advocates for people to form ties with others who are different, [Promote Thoughtful Conversation](#) requires that such a connection facilitate communication – and communication of a certain quality, involving critical self-examination, the testing of ideas and reasoning, and the formation of opinions. While [Encourage the Humanization of Others](#) requires that we see the basic humanity in others, [Promote Thoughtful Conversation](#) requires that we look for the basic legitimacy of others’ viewpoints. As we discuss below, thoughtful conversation is important for many other reasons, which include democratic policy-making and civic engagement.

Why It's Important

Chambers cited two broad benefits deliberative exchanges can bring to democracy: encouraging respect and cooperation between opposing groups, and bringing all citizens into the creation of public policy in a meaningful way.

Philosopher and political economist John Stuart Mill wrote that deliberation leads to a more informed public, one more capable of making productive choices for society. Mill argued a person's own experience is an insufficient source of knowledge. A person's or group's judgement only becomes worthy of confidence once it has been tested or given the opportunity to grow. In deliberation, people have this opportunity by engaging with different viewpoints, resolving factual errors, and broadening their information base. This exchange provides citizens a "clearer perception and livelier impression of truth."

Beyond informing the public, philosopher Bernard Manin contended that deliberation also increases a decision's legitimacy in the eyes of the people. People are less likely to think a conclusion is arbitrary if they feel they had a substantial role in the process. Public deliberation allows citizens to see the lines of thought and the reasoning that led the group to its decision, even if that decision is ultimately against their interests. "A legitimate decision does not represent the *will* of all, but is one that results from the *deliberation* of all," Manin wrote.

Manin's theory that deliberation enhances legitimacy bears out in Mutz's work. Her research suggested that those more informed about opposing opinions are more politically

tolerant, which is the willingness to extend civil liberties to those with whom they strongly disagree. Her findings suggest that an individual unaware of the reasons behind opposing views may perceive the policies of the winning side as less legitimate. This idea is reflected in work on deliberative polling, described by Fishkin and government professor Robert Luskin as a process that allows citizens to participate in small-group discussions and consult with experts with the goal of generating more reflective public opinion. As a specific example, public policy professor Baogang He and political communication researcher Alice Siu, along with Fishkin and Luskin, conducted a deliberative poll about infrastructure funding in China. The town that conducted the deliberative poll subsequently implemented the consensus drawn from the discussion, and the researchers found that the experience engendered community support and encouraged a sense that the government was responding to the needs of the people. In contrast, a nearby town that did not offer the chance for public deliberation faced protests and riots over their infrastructure projects.

Deliberation can also boost civic engagement. In a study focused on a moderated discussion about the 2000 presidential election, political communication researcher Vincent Price found that participation in the discussion inspired more social trust and political participation. Communication researchers Sebastián Valenzuela, Yonghwan Kim, and Homero Gil de Zúñiga also found that individuals who reported talking about politics with those with whom they don't have a close, personal relationship were also more likely to participate in political action online, such as posting comments on a political blog or making

a campaign contribution. Research from communication professors Bruce Hardy and Dietram Scheufele showed that people who engaged in more political discussions overall (both online and in-person) were better informed and more likely to engage in a range of political activities, such as voting or contacting a public official.

In perhaps the most overarching argument for the importance of deliberation, communication researcher Michael Delli Carpini, human development professor Fay Lomax Cook, and political scientist Lawrence Jacobs argued that talking with other citizens in public about critical issues is a form of democratic participation, just as much as traditional forms of participation like voting, protesting, and attending political rallies. Robust deliberation, while it can affect these other actions, can also itself be seen as an indicator of democratic health.

How We Can Move the Needle

People can lack the motivation and the opportunity to engage in thoughtful conversation, particularly with those who may question their beliefs. However, it is possible to create spaces for deliberative dialogue by carefully considering the conditions that enable discussion, including the setting in which it takes place, the diversity of the participants, and the presence of facilitators or moderators.

Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs cited the possible functional benefits of using online forums for thoughtful conversation. More flexible than in-person events, online discussions could focus on more timely issues and

take place on a larger scale and over a longer period of time. Deliberation also can be successful online, as work on deliberative polling finds. Political researcher Shanto Iyengar, with Fishkin and Luskin, found that participants in deliberative polls both online and in-person became more informed about public policy after the experience and demonstrated shifts in their opinion on foreign policy issues.

Other work finds that deliberative thought online depends on the existing tenor of the conversation and the architecture of the digital space. An experiment by computer-mediated communication researcher Abhay Sukumaran and colleagues found that people in online forums tend to conform to the standards of thoughtfulness that they perceive others as setting. When existing comments on opinion pieces were longer, developed their arguments better and offered more relevant, interesting ideas, participants wrote lengthier comments that were more relevant and took longer to compose. This experiment indicates that deliberative conversation online does not come about by accident, but could require careful guidance from forum moderators. Even more importantly, a second experiment showed that the design of online space could affect the conditions for thoughtful commentary. Spaces encouraging constructive commentary through content and design generated more issue-relevant thoughts.

Moderation is another part of a forum's design, a factor political communication researchers Scott Wright and John Street noted is crucial to consider when considering thoughtful conversation online. When comparing online discussion forums in Europe, they found that differences in deliberation quality could in part be explained by the forums' design choices. The platform that

in general fostered higher-quality dialogue included features like pre-moderation of messages and a threaded system of messages that encouraged replies. Wright and Street also cited examples from others' work on how technology and design can promote the tenets of deliberation, such as participants using synchronous voice-based software versus text-based software to create their messages in Fishkin's online deliberative polls. This design choice avoids barring less literate individuals from fully participating and may allow some of the benefits of face-to-face discussions to translate to an online space.

One example of an online forum that illustrates the Thoughtful Conversation signal in practice is the 1.2 million member Change My View subreddit on the social media site Reddit. The forum operates under a strict set of rules. Users must provide the reasoning behind their point of view, which they must truly hold and must truly be open to changing. Replies must be substantive, and hostile comments are barred. The original poster must reply within three hours, and people are encouraged to acknowledge when their view has been changed.

Whether online or in-person, discussion in a diverse group ensures exposure to different opinions and life experiences, an essential component of thoughtful conversation. In an analysis of online discussion threads focused on the 2004 U.S. presidential election, communication researcher Weiyu Zhang, media professor Xiaoxia Cao and statistics expert Minh Ngoc Tran found that threads with titles that invited more diverse or open political discussion (for example, an ideologically ambiguous title like "The political spin room" on Yahoo!) had more sophisticated conversations, characterized by participants offering

a greater number of reasons to justify their opinions, than participants in threads that catered to one party or ideology (for example, a thread title that clearly indicates support for Democrats like "Democrats_Won!" on Yahoo!).

Research has suggested that discussion group composition can affect other requirements of deliberative dialogue, such as equal opportunity for all group members to participate. For example, political science professors Christopher Karpowitz, Tali Mendelberg and Lee Shaker found that women are often disadvantaged in deliberating groups and speak significantly less than men. Women participate more in mixed-gender groups when they aren't the minority and are asked to reach a decision based on majority rule, as opposed to unanimously. However, women had higher average speaking times in all-female groups than in other group compositions. The study results indicate that the makeup of the group and the structure of the conversation should be carefully considered when forming spaces for thoughtful conversation.

The majority of the previously mentioned deliberative experiments have moderators or facilitators who shared relevant facts with participants, guided the group's conversation, or both. In their overview of the needs of public deliberation, political researchers Peter Levine, John Gastil, and Archon Fung asserted the involvement of a trained facilitator is a critical requirement of a well-organized deliberative conversation. They wrote that facilitators have the ability to set clear rules for the discussion, provide background information, and support the voices of less advantaged groups or individuals. Even small adjustments to moderation tactics and procedures can have an impact on the

quality of a discussion. In a Geneva-based discussion about the political rights of foreigners, political scientist André Bächtiger, with sociologists Lucio Baccaro and Marion Deville, found that if moderators asked participants to share their stance and reasoning behind it at the beginning of a discussion, it resulted in higher quality deliberation than when participants were asked not to take a position at all.

Dryzek and environmental scientist Alex Lo have also suggested that introducing bridging rhetoric, such as analogies, helps people have more productive conversation. Participants in small-group discussions in Australia about climate change considered an analogy between the popular Australian Medicare tax and a tax that would help curb emissions. After deliberating with this bridging rhetoric, climate change skeptics expressed more openness to a carbon tax as legitimate policy opinion. Dryzek and Lo credited the change to analogies' ability to bring the trust and familiarity associated with one topic to the process of weighing of the merits of a similar, but less familiar topic.

Although these projects are encouraging, most experts agree that the success of deliberation is highly context-dependent. Reviewing many experiments related to deliberative dialogue, Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs wrote that "deliberation can (and should) take different forms depending on both the nature of the issue under discussion and the makeup of the group."

How to Measure

One coding scheme, developed by technology and communication researcher

Jennifer Stromer-Galley, evaluates the content of political discussions. The scheme tracks many key concepts of deliberation, such as expressions of disagreement, how active each individual is in the discussion, and whether statements made are on topic and include evidence, among other factors. Stromer-Galley also included measures about the behavior of moderators, such as whether moderators provide instructions for the deliberation, ask questions of the group, invite those who have not spoken to share their thoughts, and intervene if there is a conflict between group members.

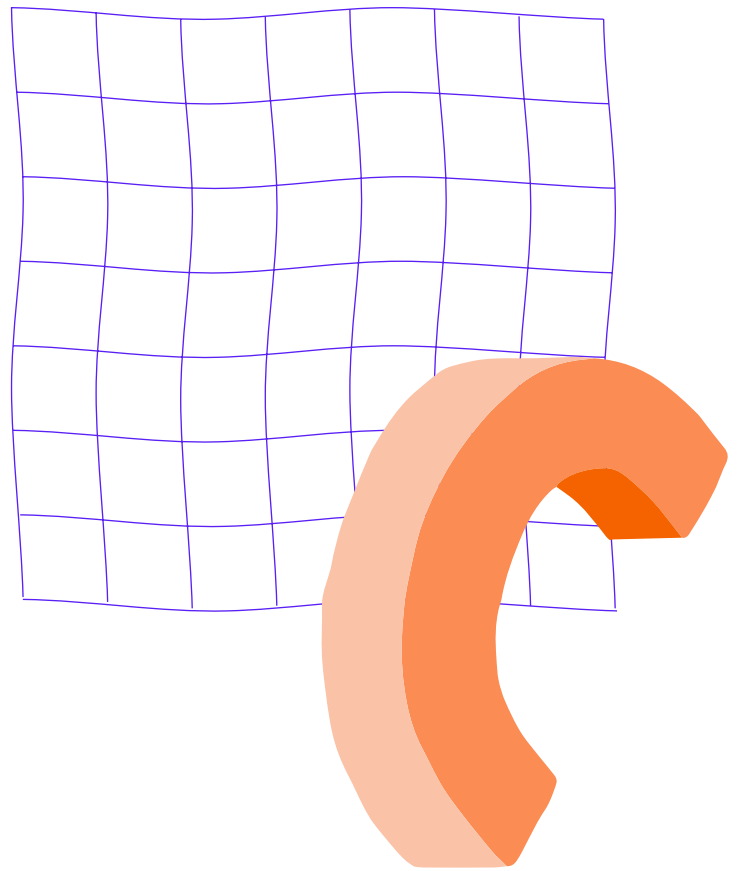
Vincent Price, with political communication researchers Joseph Cappella and Lilach Nir, focused on a more specific element of deliberative conversation. The three researchers proposed that individuals contemplating the validity of their own opinions are engaging in higher-quality political thought. The team developed a measure they call "argument repertoire" (AR), which takes into account how well individuals grasp others' points of view. To generate an AR score, they incorporate not only the number of reasons that people give to justify their own position, but also how many relevant reasons people give about why others may disagree. In a study that focused on a year-long, moderated panel of 1,600 Americans, Cappella, Price and Nir found that participating in deliberative discussions increased individuals' ARs.

Linguist James Pennebaker, in collaboration with computational experts and other cognitive researchers, designed another measure that has its foundation in the specific words people use when having discussions. Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) is a text analysis program that records different features of language as they appear in a

piece of text. Although LIWC can measure many qualities of a discussion, according to Pennebaker and social computing expert Yla Tausczik, the degree to which certain terms or phrases are used can reveal an individual's depth of thinking and the tone of a conversation. For example, the use of prepositions indicates a person is communicating more complex and more concrete thoughts and assents later in discussions can signal more consensus within a group. Communication researchers Jennifer Brundidge, Scott Reid, Sujin Choi and Ashley Muddiman used LIWC to evaluate the extent to which bloggers on opposite sides of the political divide consider other viewpoints in their writing, an important indicator of deliberative thought. Measures like this can help with determining how thoughtful a conversation was.

A widely known way to evaluate the quality of deliberation is the Discourse Quality Index (DQI), originally designed by Bächtiger and political researchers Marco Steenbergen, Markus Spörndli and Jürg Steiner. The DQI

codes for six factors: (1) How free a person is to participate, or whether a person is being interrupted, (2) The quality of the justifications people state for their positions, (3) References to the common good, (4) The level of positivity or negativity expressed toward the opposing group, (5) Respect for counterarguments, and (6) Attempts at compromise. Researchers propose that the DQI could be used to measure results of future research on the ideal conditions to stimulate robust discourse. However, it is worth noting that the DQI was developed to evaluate discussions in parliament and may not always be appropriate to apply to discussions among ordinary citizens.



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Expert Q&A



Three key questions with **Jennifer Stromer-Galley**, Syracuse University, and **Patrícia Rossini**, University of Liverpool

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

Our current political and social climate is highly polarized. Survey research suggests that the U.S. is the most divided on political ideology that we've been in modern history. Research on political discussion and deliberation shows that when people talk "across the aisle" and hear the perspectives of those they oppose, they have greater understanding and empathy for those perspectives, and they are less likely to demonize or "other" them. When we see people whose views are different from our own, not as the enemy, but as people who see the world through

different eyes and experiences and value systems, then we can work to find common ground on policy. Research also suggests that when people undertake thoughtful dialogue, their political views are moderated; they become less extreme in their own thinking. They also are able to better understand and justify their own opinions. When people hold more stable opinions, they are less susceptible to propaganda and manipulation, which might otherwise lead them to support policies that actually are against their own interests.

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?

There have been several experimental and commercial platforms that have tried to foster thoughtful dialogue. Those platforms generally enable long posts so that people can fully develop their arguments and allows for hyperlinking so that people can cite/reference sources to support their perspectives. They also facilitate community-generated evaluations of the posts and allow people posting them to foster self-policing of problematic content, such as up-voting and down-voting by the community, with the up-voted content most visible, and they feature rankings or evaluations of people posting based on their previous participation. They also generally encourage or require an identity – the actual name and an associated valid email account to foster thoughtful dialogue over ranting and personal attacks. Community-based moderation, with moderators chosen based on the quality of their contributions and engagement with the community overall (i.e. reputation), helps bridge heated disagreement, and enforce community norms, including ejecting people exhibiting problematic discourse.

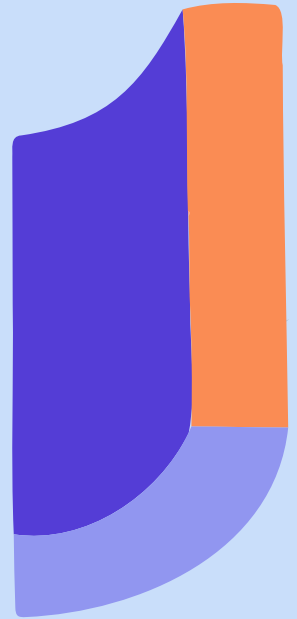
It is worth noting that people have a variety of motivations for using social media, messaging, and web search platforms. People do not necessarily want to engage in deep discussion on controversial moral and political topics. The key to promoting such even when people are not seeking it is the opportunity to encounter different information and perspectives. That means algorithms that currently learn from users' behaviors to return results that look like prior behavior hinders those opportunities; such algorithms foster homogeneity of informa-

tion, people, and perspectives, leading to greater political polarization. Algorithms that allow for exposure to difference are key to enabling thoughtful dialogue from the start.

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

Our social media and web search platforms are not the primary reason for the political polarization that we are experiencing currently in the United States. Yet, it's likely a contributing factor. At a macro-scale, public opinion surveys that asked people their frequency of talking with others who are different from them would serve as a measure. As well, social scientists have developed ways to measure the diversity of perspectives, the presence of claims and counter claims, the tone, such as the degree of incivility, and the depth of engagement on difficult topics of actual conversations happening on social media platforms. They have developed techniques to study social network ties and the diversity of the people who interact in the network. Simpler metrics, such as the length and the volume of participation, may also serve as an indicator of substantive contributions and could be adopted alongside other techniques that examine the content or tone of the discussions. As well, rich ethnographic approaches can be used to monitor online discussions to understand the nature and extent of discussion in nuanced ways. In short, there are a variety of measurement techniques – from surveys, to algorithmic analysis to classify discussion, to network analysis, to ethnography – that can be deployed in the effort to track the presence and extent of thoughtful dialogue online.

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 “promote thoughtful conversation,” 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.

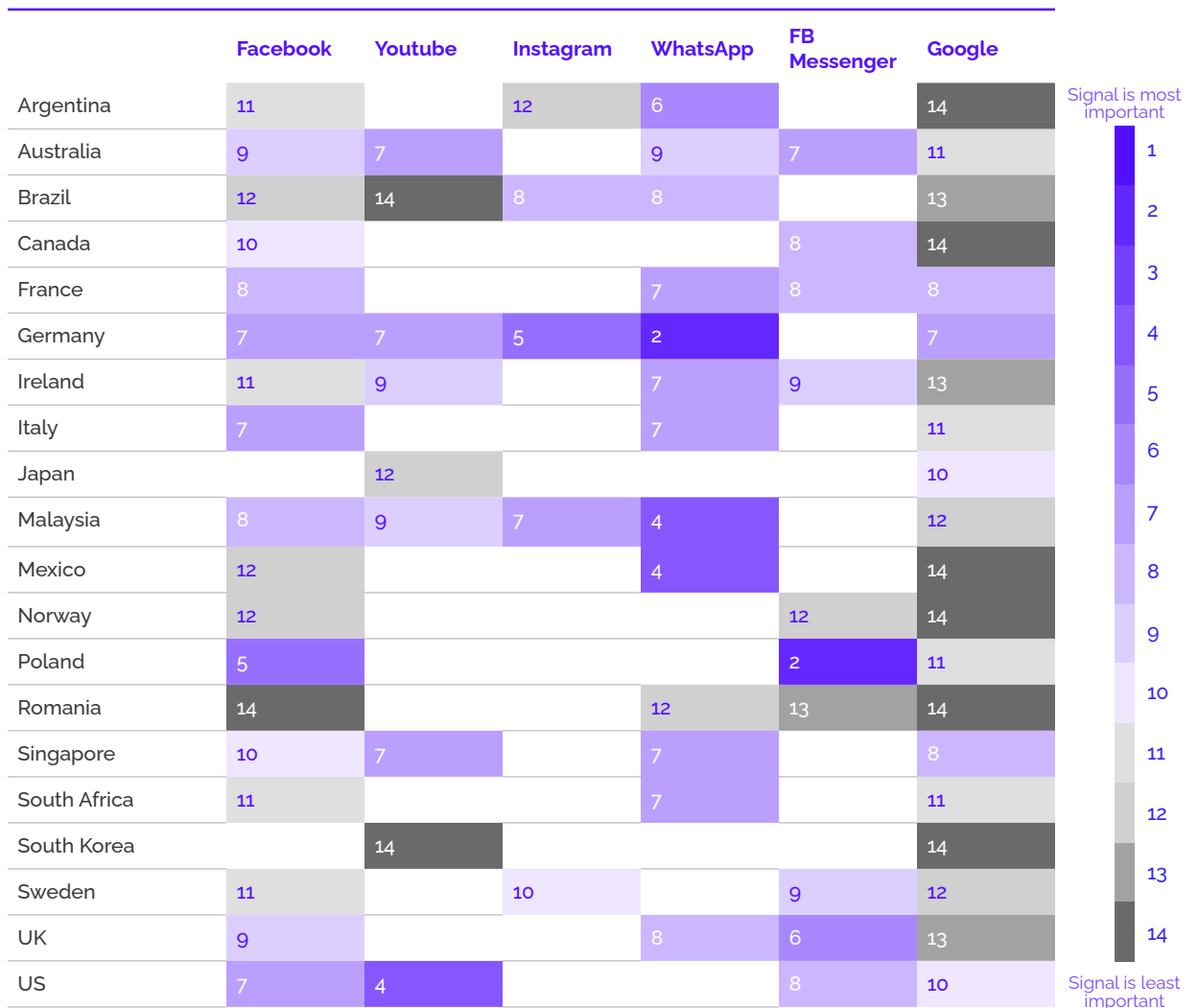
¹ The analyses include only countries where at least 200 people responded that the social/ message/ search platform was the one that they use most frequently, and then only those platforms where we had data for at least 1,000 people. For Google, this includes all 20 countries. For Facebook, this includes 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. Although the signal was not rated as most important across the countries and platforms we analyzed, it ranked as the second most important signal for WhatsApp superusers in Germany and for Facebook Messenger superusers in Poland.

Importance ranking: Promote thoughtful conversation

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.

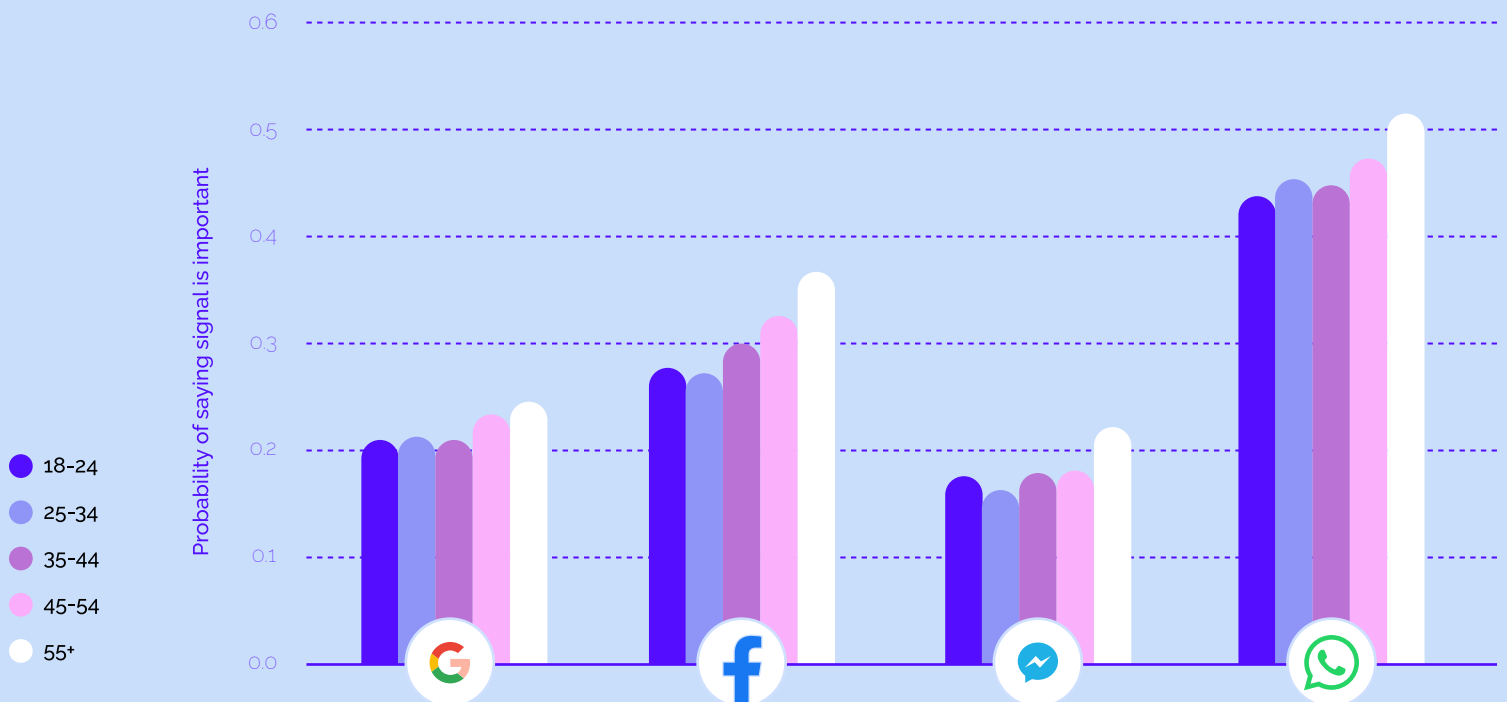


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording: Which of the following do you think it is important for [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] to do? Please select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

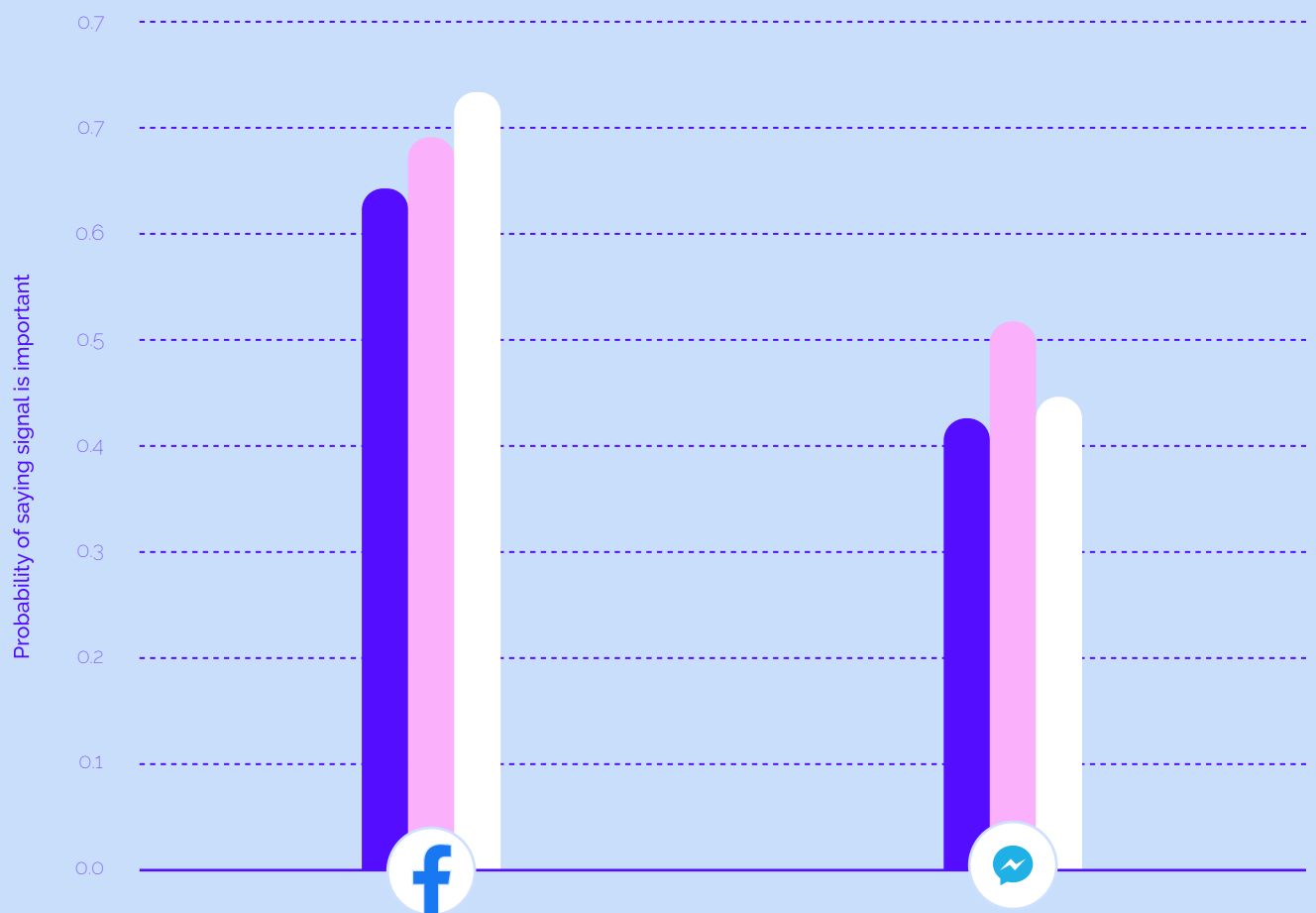
Age predicted whether superusers thought that "promoting thoughtful conversation" was important for four of the five platforms: Google, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. For all four, those who were older (55+) were more likely to think that the signal was important than other age groups.

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 Education

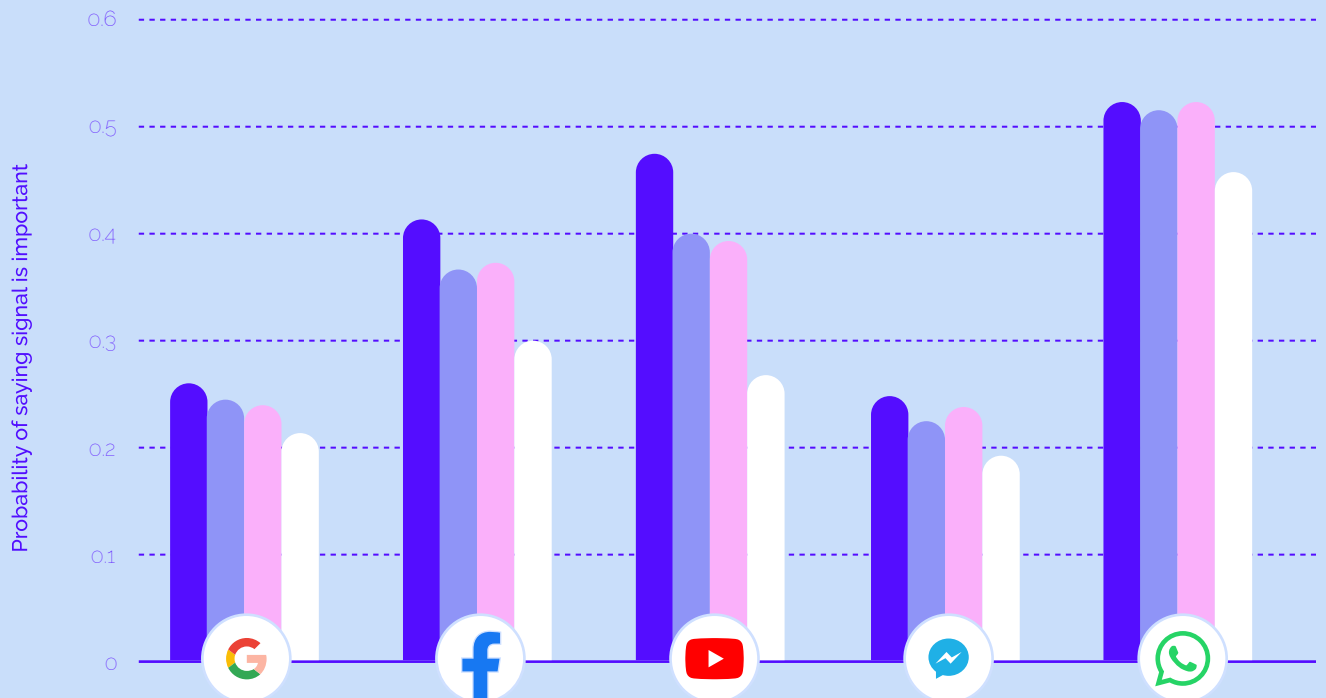
The importance of "promoting thoughtful conversation" varied by education for superusers of Facebook and Facebook Messenger. For Facebook, as education increased, so did the probability of saying that the signal was important. For Facebook Messenger, those with middle levels of education were more likely to say that the signal was important than those with high or low levels of education.



Importance of the Signal by Ideology³

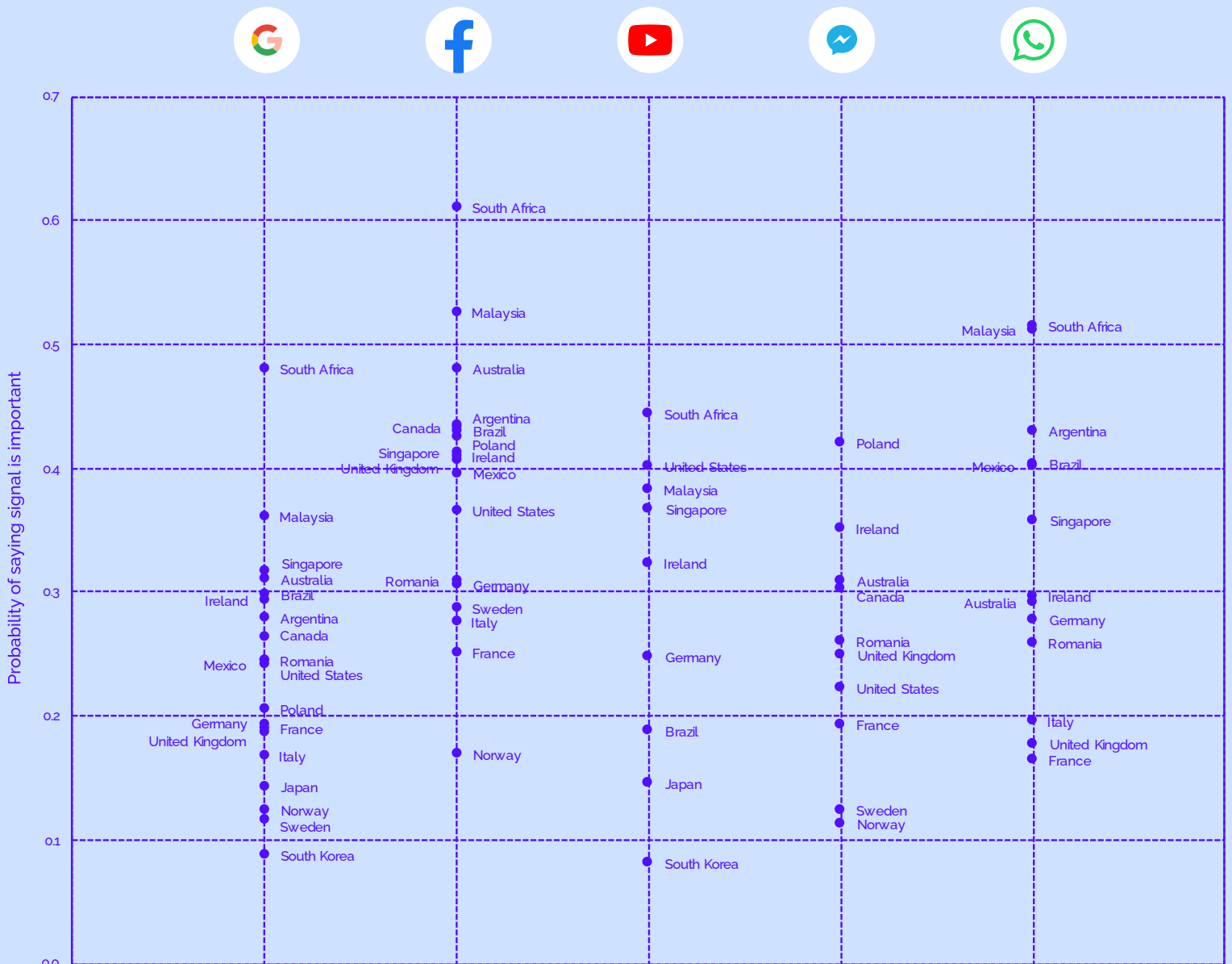
When it came to ideology, those on the political left were more likely to say that “promoting thoughtful conversation” was important compared to those with other ideologies for Facebook and YouTube. For Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp those who didn't know their ideology were less likely to say that the signal was important. For Google, those with a left-leaning ideology or a middle ideology were more likely to say that the signal was important compared to those reporting that they didn't know their ideology. For Facebook Messenger, those on the right and the left reported that the signal was more important 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 “promoting thoughtful conversation” was. The chart below shows the probability of saying that the signal is important by platform and by country. Overall, survey respondents in Malaysia and South Africa were more likely to endorse this signal as important across most of the platforms. Fewer respondents endorsed the signal as important across most of the platforms in France, Norway, Sweden, and South Korea.



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. Performance on this signal ran from neutral to marginally positive, with no obvious patterns either by platform or by country.

Performance index: Promote thoughtful conversation

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.

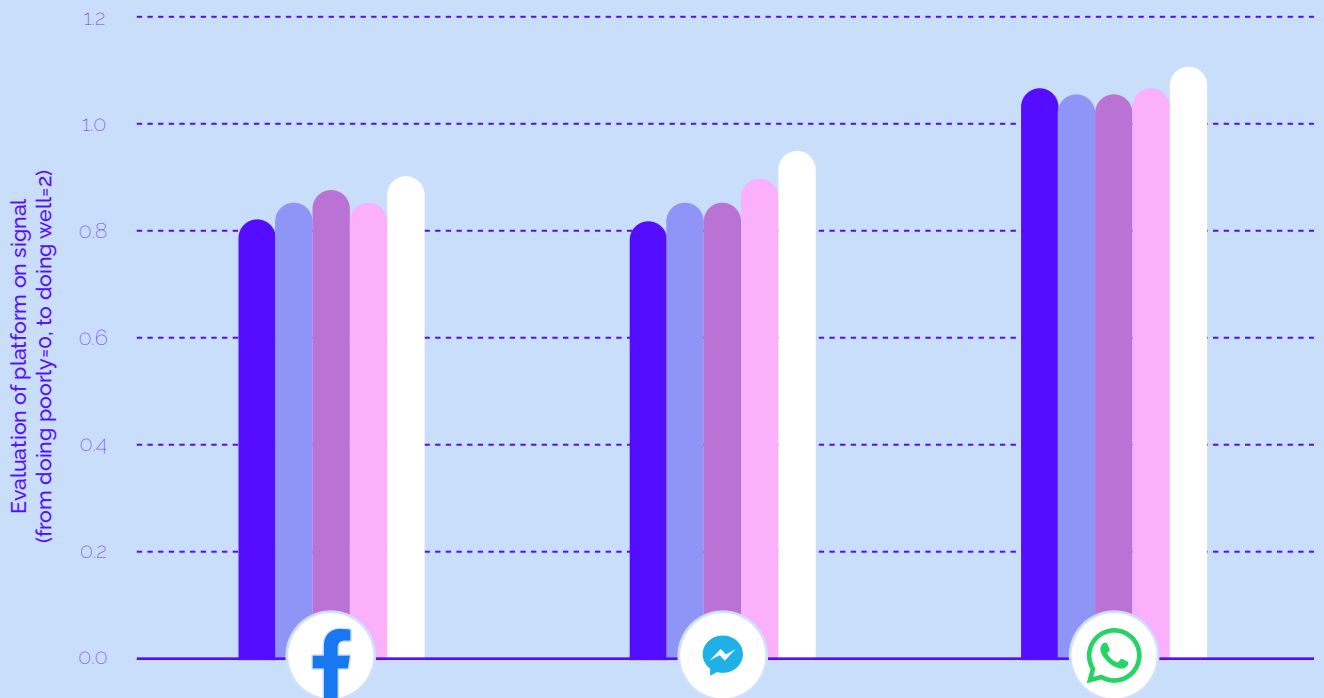


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording - Which of the following do you think [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] does well at? Please select all that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

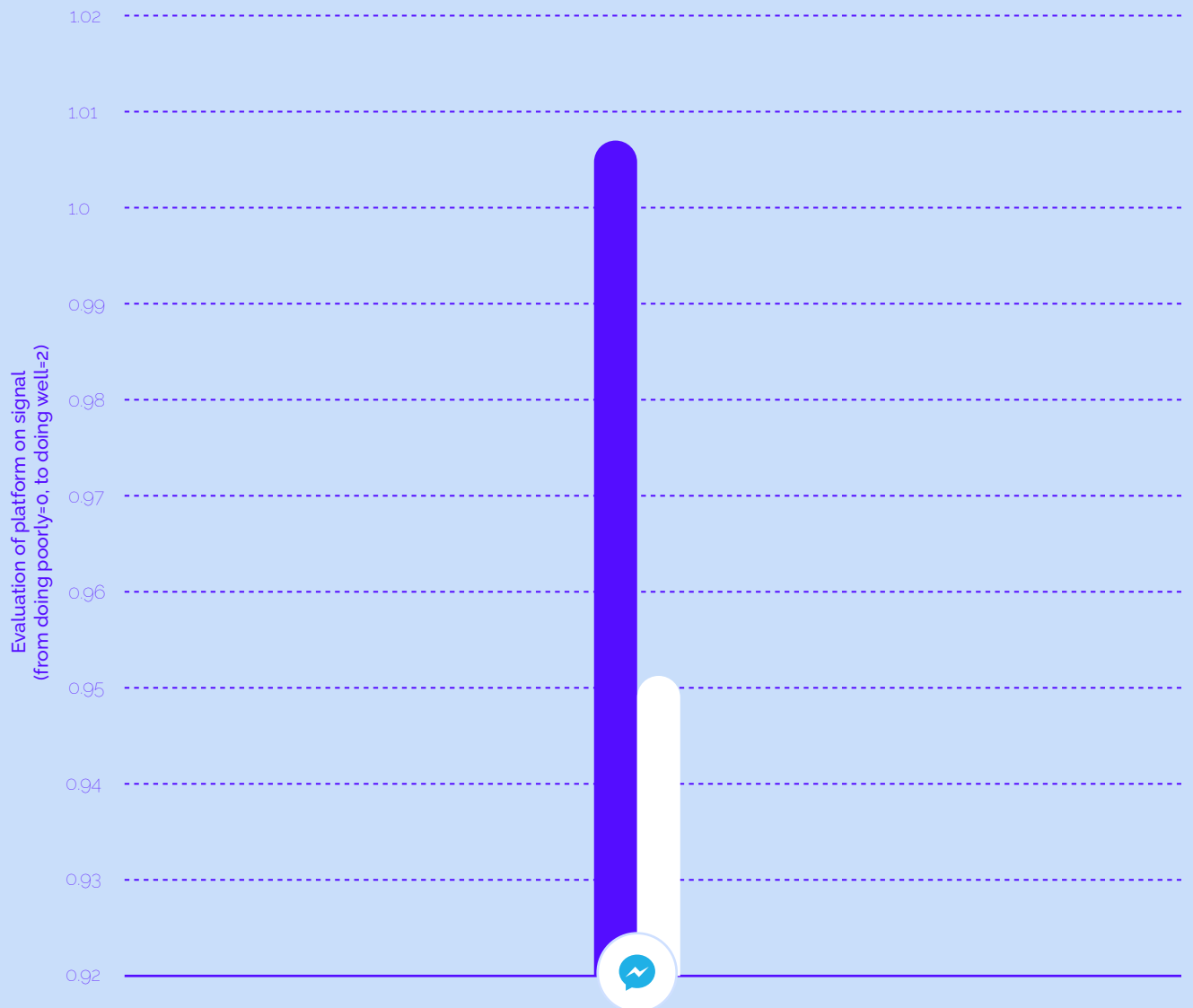
For two of the five platforms (Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp), older superusers (55+) rated the platform's performance on "promoting thoughtful conversation" more positively than other age groups. For Facebook, those 55+ rated the platform more positively than those 18-34 and those 45-54.

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).



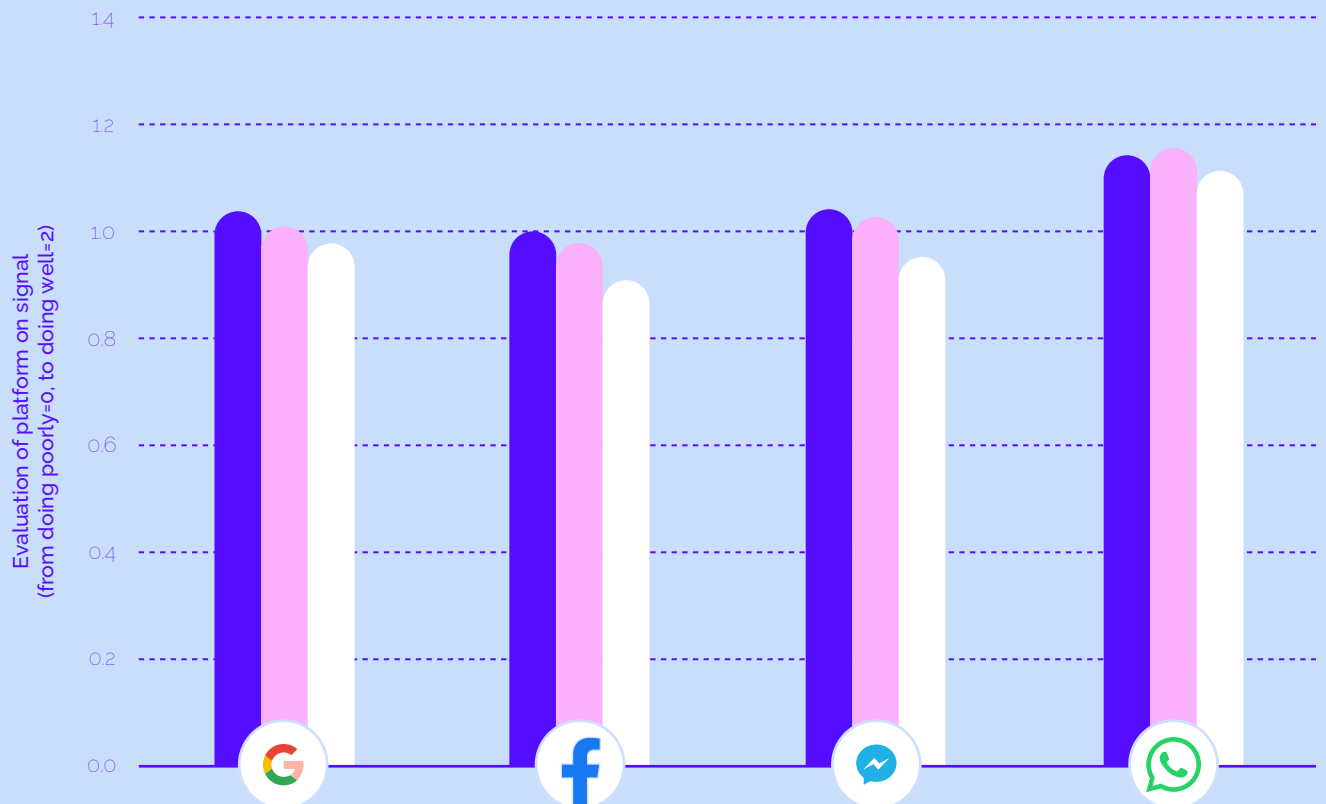
Platform Performance on the Signal by Gender

For Facebook Messenger, women rated the platform's performance on "promoting thoughtful conversation" better than did men.



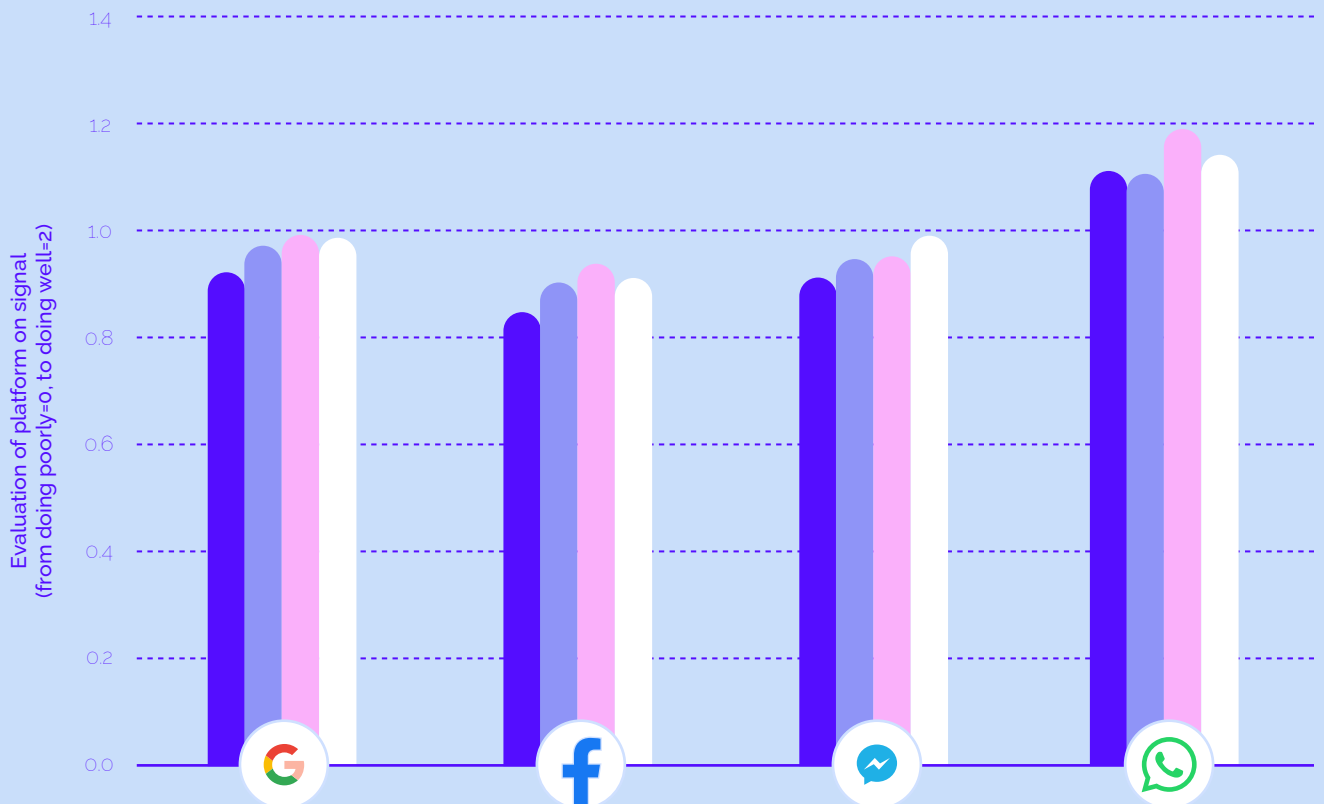
Platform Performance on the Signal by Education

Education significantly predicted what superusers thought about how well the platform was doing at “promoting thoughtful conversation” for four platforms: Google, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. Respondents with high levels of education rated each of these platforms less positively than did respondents with low and medium levels of education.



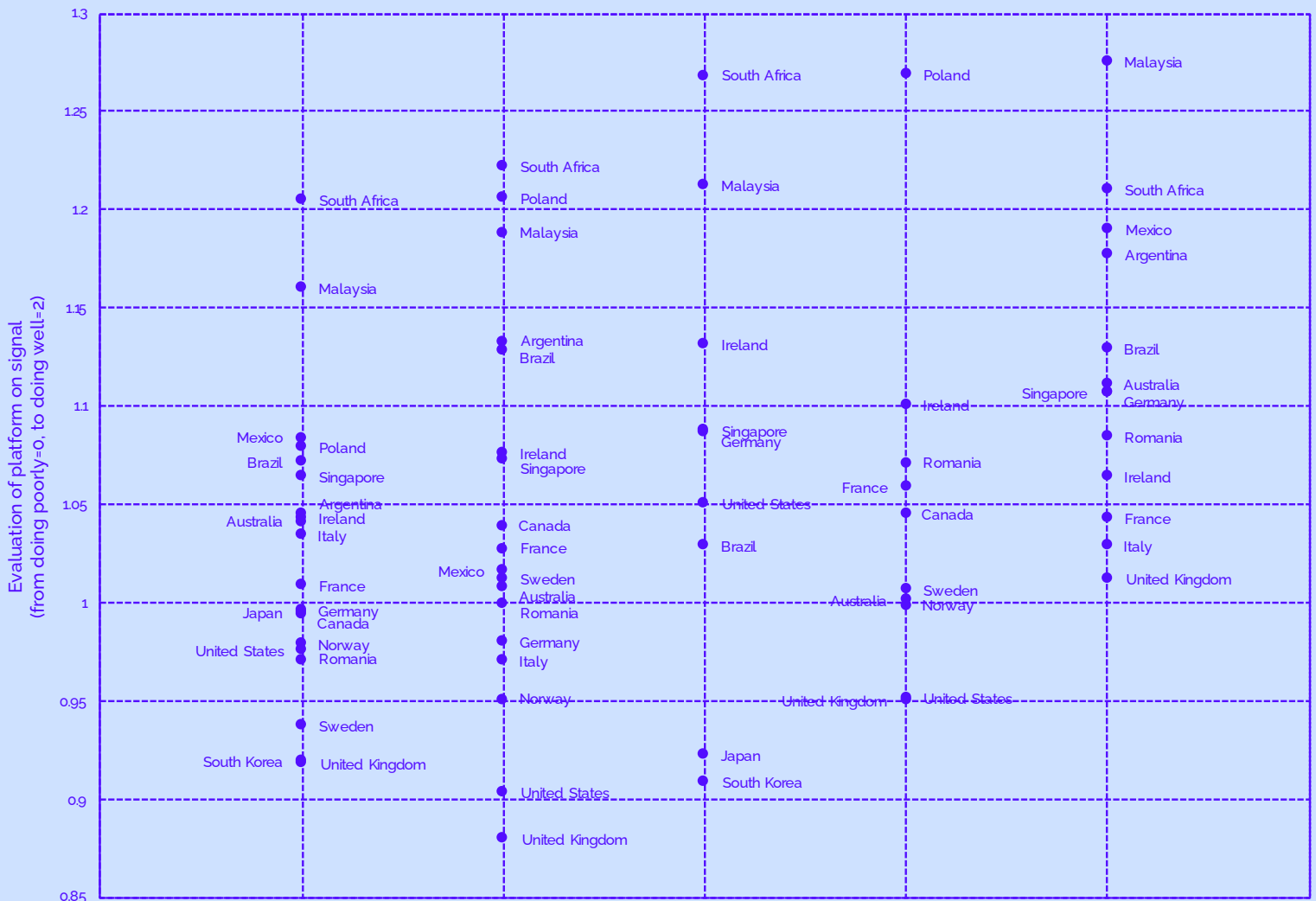
Platform Performance on the Signal by Ideology

Those on the political left evaluated Google and Facebook more poorly on “promoting thoughtful conversation” than did those with other ideological leanings. For Facebook, those on the right also evaluated the platform’s performance on the signal more positively than those with middle ideologies. For Facebook Messenger, those who didn’t know their ideology evaluated the platform’s performance more positively than did those on the left. For WhatsApp, those on the political right evaluated WhatsApp more positively on this signal than did others. Further, those who didn’t know their ideology evaluated WhatsApp’s performance more positively than those in the middle.

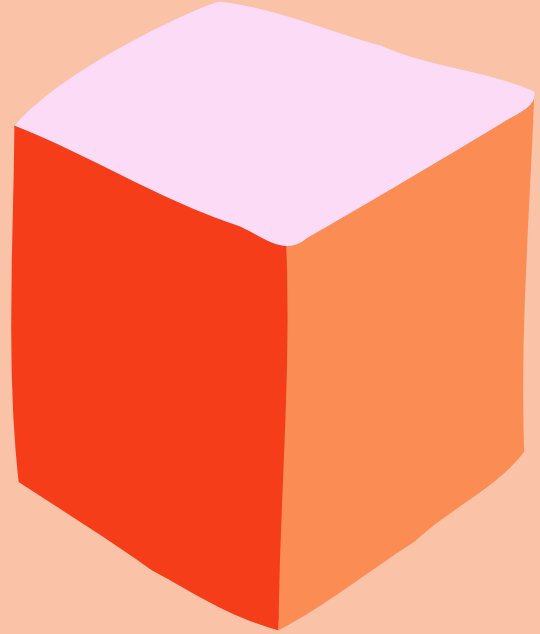


Platform Performance on the Signal by Country

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 Malaysia and South Africa tended to say that the platforms performed better with respect to this signal than those in the United States, United Kingdom, and South Korea.



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.



I think what is thoughtful? According to who?... What is thoughtful in one country might not necessarily be the same in another country based on cultural differences... Someone in America investigating on a cultural practice in South Africa doesn't make sense." – Phumzile, South African focus group participant

Participants generally agreed with the premise that thoughtful conversations are good, though their comments reflected different interpretations of the word thoughtful. Some defined it as tending to think seriously or carefully about things



I would wish that people think about what they write or post before they send it. They write so much rubbish, and the answers are so silly that you feel ashamed of having switched on your computer. So, promote thoughtful conversation is something I very much wish for.” – Walter, German focus group participant

while others understood the term to mean showing care or consideration in how one treats people.

Renata, of Brazil, noted that promoting thoughtful conversations on social media could help people reflect on important issues, such as the environment and education. “People look for reflection [on social media] too, sometimes,” explained Ivo, of Brazil. “They’re going through problems, so they’ll look for something related to that on social media.”

To Walter, of Germany, being thoughtful on social media means putting thought into posts. “I would wish that people think about what they write or post before they send it,” he said. “They write so much rubbish, and the answers are so silly that you feel ashamed of having switched on your computer. So, promote thoughtful conversation is something I very much wish for.”

In the United States, some participants talked about the importance of being thoughtful to others. As Elisa put it, “we should be just

thoughtful to everybody, and it goes for life in general. I was just raised the Christian way that way, that’s how I am. That’s my life.” In a similar vein, Matt stated: “You should treat everybody as you want to be treated yourself, sure.”

Thoughtful conversations can mean different things in different national or cultural contexts, which raised concerns among some participants. As Phumzile, of South Africa, said: “I think what is thoughtful? According to who? ... What is thoughtful in one country might not necessarily be the same in another country based on cultural differences. So I think that’s... where Facebook always finds itself... You report something, and they’re like ‘Okay, let’s investigate.’ Who is going to investigate? Someone in America investigating on a cultural practice in South Africa doesn’t make sense.”

Participants wondered how thoughtful conversations can be promoted and whether it is the job of social media platforms to do so. “I find it difficult,” remarked Ahmet, of Germany. “I think there are a million conversations

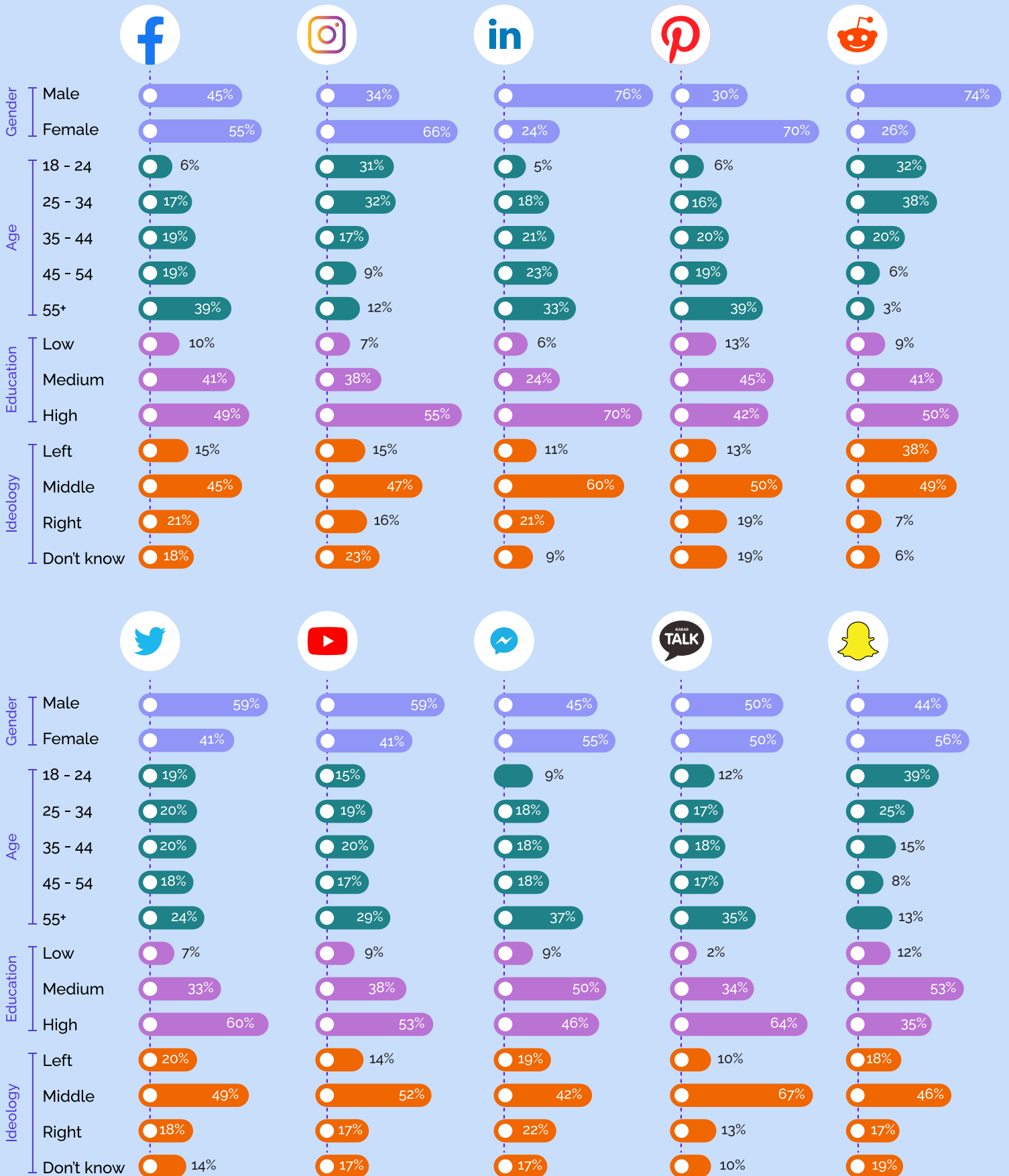
per hour or per day. And then you would need a moderator for each of them. But this moderator would have his own opinion, and then he would find things thoughtful and other[s] not."

Other participants from Germany proposed alternative options: Platforms could use keyword filters that would not allow posting content that contains certain words (Omer's suggestion), or there could be a rating system for posts so that people could report inappropriate posts (Fabian's suggestion). Other participants worried these approaches could limit freedom of expression.

Another view participants expressed is that being thoughtful is not always desirable. "If social media is trying to promote or encourage users to have thoughtful conversation, it is not so real," said Jia Ming, of Malaysia. "... Sometimes, you don't need to be thoughtful. Sometimes you need truth. Of course it depends."

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



Messaging



Search engines



