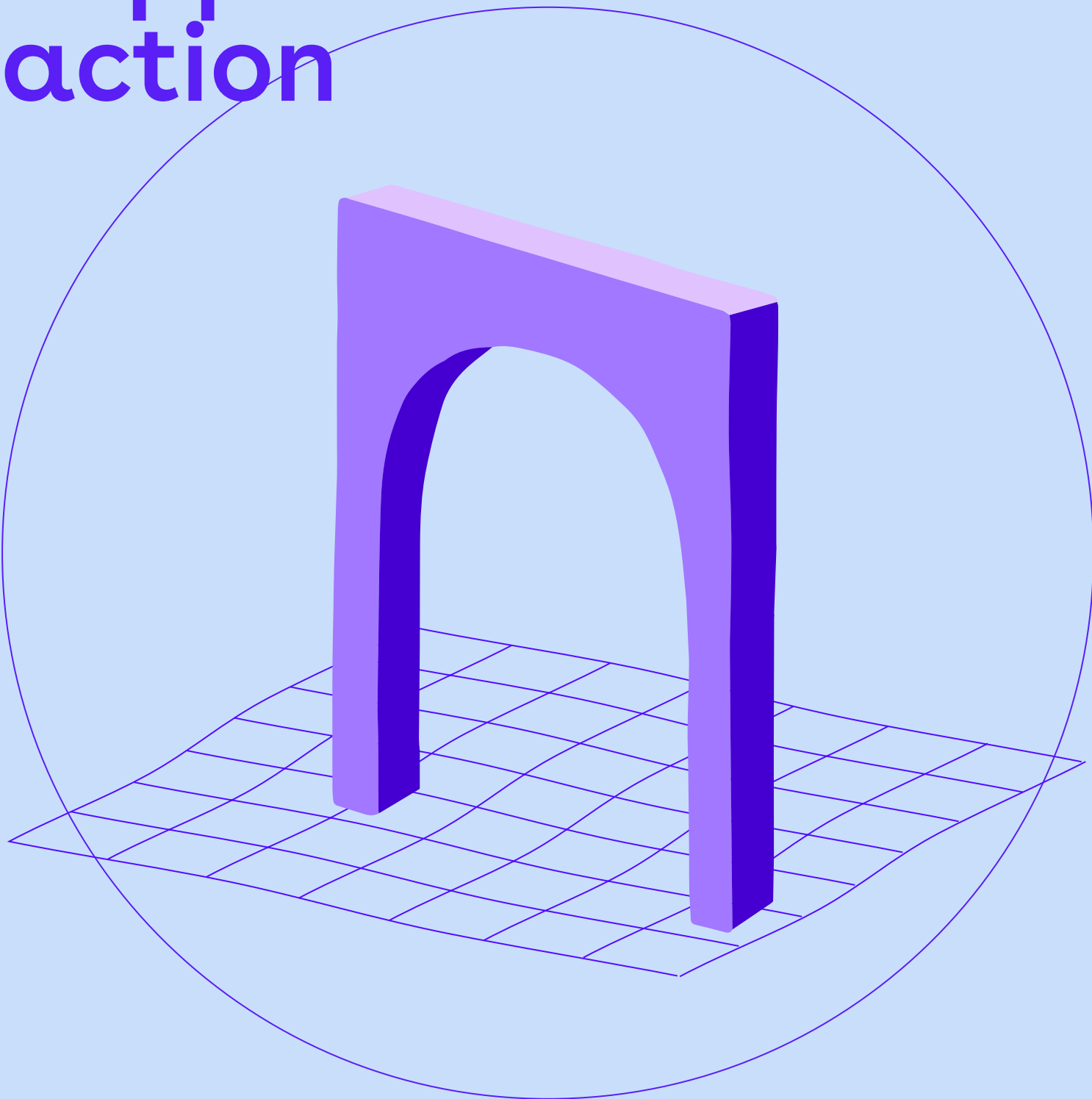# Support civic action

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.

Table of contents

At a glance

Civic action, or civic engagement, is action intended to identify and address issues of public concern.

Why It Matters

Civic action can enhance people's feeling that they have a say in government. Civic engagement may also improve interpersonal trust, making it easier for people to do good deeds for each other, and volunteering helps people find jobs. There's evidence that when people are more civically engaged – not just in politics but outside it – governments are more efficient, more fiscally responsible and more responsive to citizens' needs. And the communities where people are more civically active are likely to be stronger economically, safer, healthier and better educated.
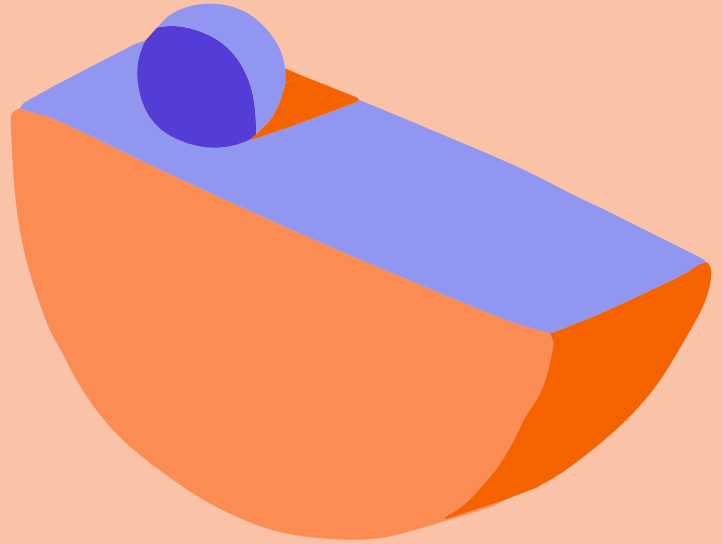
> *Reminding people that they have to vote for something… At least it cannot do any harm if people are reminded. Before a vote is forgotten and not enough people take part." – Sarah, German focus group participant*

Putting the Signal Into Practice

- Facebook and political scientist Robert Bond and colleagues found that Facebook users who were shown political mobilization messages were more likely to vote in US congressional elections, and communication scholar Katherine Haenschen found that tagging newer or infrequent voters in voting reminders on Facebook can lead to substantial gains in voter turnout.

- Communication scholar Henry Jenkins suggested that digital games serve as powerful introductions to civic action because they teach people what it feels like to be empowered. iCivics offers a number of civic engagement games, including Activate, which teaches players how to grow a movement and Counties Work, in which players have to answer constituent requests and try to keep them happy. https://www.icivics.org/games

- California Counts, a collaboration between four public media outlets in the state, hosted a Voter Cram Session in which participants learned about all 17 of that year's ballot propositions in two hours. https://www.scpr.org/events/2016/11/02/2167/ca-counts-voter-cram-session/

- Political reporter Mary Plummer of Pasadenia, Calif., public radio station KPCC also heard voter concerns by having lunch with residents and set up listening booths at a local restaurant and swap meet. KPCC then created an online and on-air voter guide to answer the questions raised, even doing personalized research for individual questions that listeners posed. KPCC's Ashley Alvarado describes the station's work here: https://medium.com/engagement-at-kpcc/voting-is-super-hard-heres-how-kpcc-made-it-easier-for-our-audience-ccbd6928a24

Literature review

By Ori Tenenboim and Jay Jennings,
Center for Media Engagement
With thanks to Sebastián Valenzuela,
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

What the Signal Is

"Support civic action" has to do with what academic researchers call "civic engagement" – actions intended to identify and address issues of public concern. Political communication scholar Michael Delli Carpini, who offered this definition of civic engagement, sees the term as encompassing both individual and collective actions. According to Delli Carpini, civic engagement can take many forms, such as individual voluntarism, organizational involvement, and electoral participation.

Another expansive definition was offered by law and education scholar Thomas Ehrlich: "Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes."

A distinction can be made between political participation acts, such as voting or attending a political rally, and acts outside the sphere of government and politics, including donating to charities, volunteering, and going to a community meeting, according to work by political scientist Cliff Zukin and

colleagues. We take the view that civic engagement can include political participation, as well as non-political actions dedicated to civic life. Based on these definitions, civic engagement is about behavior, it has a purpose, and it is related to public issues.

Related Concepts

Although civic engagement is related to a number of concepts, we focus here on the key concepts of *social capital*, *dutiful citizenship* and *actualizing citizenship*.

According to political scientist Robert Putnam, social capital refers to connections among individuals, including "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." Social policy scholars Mark Stern and Susan Seifert suggested that social capital refers to a set of resources that can potentially influence behavior, whereas civic engagement refers to the behavior itself. Sociologist Nan Lin incorporates action into her definition of social capital, saying it is "resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive action." Although social capital is related to civic engagement, it is conceptually distinct because social capital focuses on trust and networks, whereas civic action is about purposeful behavior aiming to enrich civic life.

Civic engagement is also linked to citizenship – the state of being a member of a political community. Political scientist and communication scholar Lance Bennett distinguished between two types of citizenship: *dutiful citizenship* and *actualizing citizenship*. The first one is rooted in a sense of duty and manifests in voting, participating

in government-centered activities, and joining civil society organizations or expressing interests through political parties. The second one is rooted in self-actualization through social expression (including in the digital media environment) and characterized by more personally defined acts – e.g., consumerism and volunteering – and loosely tied networks. According to Bennett – writing both as a solo researcher and with communication scholars Chris Wells and Deen Freelon – there is a generational shift in the U.S. and elsewhere from dutiful citizenship to actualizing citizenship, though citizens can combine elements from both types of citizenship. The distinction between these types is helpful because it emphasizes different, and evolving, forms of civic engagement, rather than focusing on whether civic engagement has declined or increased, for instance. The signal Support Civic Action aims to encompass the wide variety of ways in which people could engage.

Why It's Important

Civic engagement matters because it can have individual and collective benefits. We review several such outcomes below. Although many studies do not prove that civic engagement was the cause of positive perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, research has demonstrated that these are correlated, and suggests that civic engagement may benefit society.

As political scientists Elizabeth Theiss-Morse and John Hibbing reviewed, studies have found a correlation (though not a very strong one) between civic engagement and interpersonal trust. People who are involved in voluntary associations or informal social

networks are more likely to trust others, compared with those not involved. Drawing on data from repeated surveys, political scientists John Brehm and Wendy Rahn suggested that the effect of civic involvement on interpersonal trust was much stronger than the reverse effect. Trust is important because, to use Putnam's words, "trustworthiness lubricates social life" and can make it easier for people to do good deeds with the expectation of reciprocity.

Non-political civic involvement may contribute to political participation. A body of research (including political science studies by Louis Ayala and by Randall Swain and Maurice Mangum) has shown that people who are involved in voluntary associations are more likely to be active in politics. Although it is quite possible that the relationship is not causal – that is, the same types of people tend to take part in both voluntary groups and politics – another possible explanation is that people in non-political settings develop skills relevant to political participation, such as planning meetings, writing letters, and giving speeches. Yet another explanation is that voluntary association membership increases the probability of being exposed to appeals for political action (see, for example, work by political scientists Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman, & Henry Brady) – so that people already involved in groups are more likely to be asked to participate politically.
Civic engagement may also be related to government performance. In a landmark study of regional governments in Italy, Putnam demonstrated that governments were more efficient and responsive in regions with strong traditions of citizens' involvement inside and outside the sphere of politics. Specifically, governments offered services like job-training centers and day care programs, promoted investment and economic

development, and pioneered environmental standards in regions with relatively high levels of voter turnout and other activity dedicated to civic life.

Additional studies lend support to Putnam's findings. For example, Stephen Knack from the World Bank found that governments performed better in terms of financial management, human resource management, information technology, and other metrics in U.S. states with higher levels of volunteering, census response, and social trust. In a similar vein, a study of German municipalities by economics researcher Benny Geys and colleagues demonstrated that voter involvement (including voter turnout, the existence of free voter unions, and the ratio of eligible voters to total population) was positively related to government cost efficiency. Similar results were found by economics researchers Christoph Schaltegger and Benno Torgler in Switzerland and economics researcher Lars-Erik Borge and colleagues in Norway.

Further, research has shown that civic engagement is positively related to economic resiliency and other beneficial conditions. Communities where more people are civically engaged are likely to be stronger economically, safer, healthier and better educated. For example, the National Conference on Citizenship and its partners found strong positive correlations between civic engagement and communities' resilience against unemployment. American states and localities where the level of civic engagement was higher in 2006 experienced less growth in unemployment until 2010 – that is, even during a major economic downturn.

In addition, a report by Christopher Spera and colleagues at the Corporation for National and Community Service linked

volunteering with finding a job regardless of age, gender and ethnicity. A possible explanation is that individuals who engage with their community can develop skills and habits that make them more employable, e.g., developing social contacts and gaining experience that improve their chances of finding and landing a job. Also, as discussed earlier, civic involvement is correlated with interpersonal trust, and high levels of trust may facilitate economic transactions and enable greater innovation.

Engaged citizens may also affect the quality of life in their communities by deterring harm by commercial interests. For example, the economist James Hamilton showed that the higher the potential for collective action in an area, measured by actual levels of voter turnout, the lower the probability that the area will be selected for locating hazardous waste facilities. Hamilton suggested that companies were more likely to locate such facilities in neighborhoods where the expected costs of litigation, lobbying, and compensation were lower. Referring to Hamilton's study, Putnam wrote that if decision-makers expect citizens to hold them accountable, "they are more inclined to temper their worst impulses rather than face public protests."

Civic engagement can be linked with reduced crime rates. For example, sociologists Richard Rosenfeld and his colleagues showed that in U.S. geographical areas where levels of civic engagement and social trust were high, homicide rates were relatively low, regardless of variables such as the level of deprivation and the density of the population. Research has also established a relationship between civic involvement and human health. According to a review by Robert Grimm, Jr. and

colleagues at the Corporation for National and Community Service, studies show that individuals who volunteer are more likely to experience better health in later years, whether manifested in lower mortality rates, better functional abilities, or lower levels of depression. Education professors Alexander Astin, Linda Sax, and Juan Avalos found long-term effects of volunteer activities during college. Volunteering as an undergraduate was associated with positive effects for students even five years after graduation. Another notable relationship is between civic engagement and education. Political scientist David Webber found that in Missouri school districts with higher voter turnout and candidate competition, the schools' standardized test scores were higher.

The various studies mentioned above suggest that civic engagement can matter. Although these studies are correlational in nature, they document the extensive relationships between civic action and other pro-social outcomes.

How We Can Move the Needle

Increasing civic engagement or maintaining a high level of it in society can be challenging. As Delli Carpini points out, people choose to be involved in public life when they have the motivation, opportunity, and ability to do so. Thus, initiatives to encourage civic engagement would do well to address these three factors.

The digital media environment has the potential to help foster civic engagement. Drawing on an analysis of 106 survey-based

studies, sociologist Shelley Boulianne and communication researcher Yannis Theocharis found that digital media use was positively correlated with offline civic engagement among youth. Specifically, political uses of digital media—e.g., sharing political views online, discussing politics on social media, signing e-petitions, and contacting officials online—were positively correlated with offline activities inside and outside the sphere of government and politics. This suggests that providing additional opportunities for engagement is important.

Although online political expression may be viewed as a form of civic engagement in itself, it can also be a driver of other forms of civic engagement. For example, communication scholar Sebastián Valenzuela found that social media use in Chile was linked to offline protesting through online opinion expression and activism. In a similar vein, communication researcher Leticia Bode and colleagues reported that online political expression predicted teens' engagement in traditional political participation during the 2008 U.S. presidential election. Political scientist Casey Klofstad found that civic discussion is a useful step in leading young people to develop habits of civic participation. Sociologist Philip Howard finds evidence that political engagement originating through social media led to a lasting political movement in Mexico. The findings of these studies are useful when thinking about the role that social media and other online platforms can have in encouraging those who are active online to become active in their communities.

Social media seems particularly suitable for experimentation in the fostering of civic engagement. For example, Facebook and political scientist Robert Bond and colleagues conducted experiments and found that Facebook users who were shown political mobilization messages were more likely to vote in U.S. congressional elections than users who were not shown these messages. Users in the "social message" group were shown a message at the top of their News Feed. The message encouraged the user to vote, included a link to find local polling places, and displayed several elements: a clickable button reading "I Voted," a counter indicating how many other Facebook users had previously reporting voting, and small randomly selected profile pictures of the user's Facebook friends who had already clicked the "I Voted" button. Users in the "social message" group were 0.39% more likely to vote in 2010 than users who received no message at all.

As another example, communication scholar Katherine Haenschen conducted experiments on Facebook and found that tagging newer or infrequent voters in voting reminders can lead to substantial gains in voter turnout. In one of Haenschen's experiments, confederates posted "get out the vote" status updates with social pressure components and tagged specific Facebook friends in the messages. Public voting records were used to determine users' voting behavior. Users who were treated with shame or pride messages (e.g., "Records show that [name], [name], and [name] have not yet voted this year. EarlyVoting ends Friday" or "Thanks to [name], [name], and [name] for voting in past elections. Early Voting ends Friday") voted at higher rates than other users. In another experiment, Haenschen found that these treatments appeared to only be effective on newer and infrequent voters. However, the findings do suggest that social pressure on social media can be used to foster civic engagement.

Technology can be designed to foster civic action. In an edited volume full of examples on ways that technology and social media can encourage civic participation, urban planning and design scholars Magdalena Baborska-Narozny, Eve Stirling, and Fiona Stevenson outline how Facebook groups can be used to foster engagement and encourage self-organization in housing communities that have typically been lacking in social ties. In the same volume, design scholars Saba Golchehr and Naomi Bueno de Mesquita outline ways in which data from social media sites can be used to inform the pre-design stage of public places so that they more effectively serve the public and encourage engagement. Various digital formats may help foster civic engagement. For example, communication scholar Henry Jenkins suggested that digital multiplayer games "are powerful introductions to civic engagement because they taught young people what it was like to feel empowered, what it was like to feel capable of making a difference within a world, and what it was like to feel a strong set of bonds with others with whom you worked to accomplish common goals."

Civic engagement can also take place face-to-face. For example, California Counts, a collaboration between four public media outlets in the state, hosted a Voter Cram Session in which participants learned about all 17 of that year's ballot propositions in two hours. Participants marked off sample ballots as they went, to ease the voting process. Five thousand people watched the live stream, and the program also aired on six public radio stations. Participation in this event could be considered a type of civic engagement and could be used as inspiration for digital versions.

How to Measure

It is sometimes possible to measure actual participation. For example, Hamilton, Haenschen, and Bond and colleagues examined actual levels of voter turnout by accessing the voter file. But research has typically relied on self-reports by asking people whether they engaged or how frequently they engaged in certain activities. For example, focusing on community involvement, communication researcher Dhavan Shah and colleagues asked respondents how often they had engaged in the following activities: doing volunteer work, going to a club meeting, working on a community project, going to a community or neighborhood meeting, and working on behalf of a social group or cause.

Communication scholar Homero Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues asked about the frequency with which respondents engaged in other activities, such as raising money for charity, purchasing products based on the social values advocated by the company, and boycotting a certain product or service because they disagreed with the social values of the company. Gil de Zúñiga and colleagues also measured offline political participation by asking respondents if during the past 12 months they had engaged in activities such as voting, attending a political rally, calling or sending a letter to an elected public official, or speaking to a public official in person. To measure online political participation, these researchers asked respondents to rate how often they used the internet for activities, such as writing to a politician, making a campaign contribution, and signing up to volunteer for a campaign/issue.
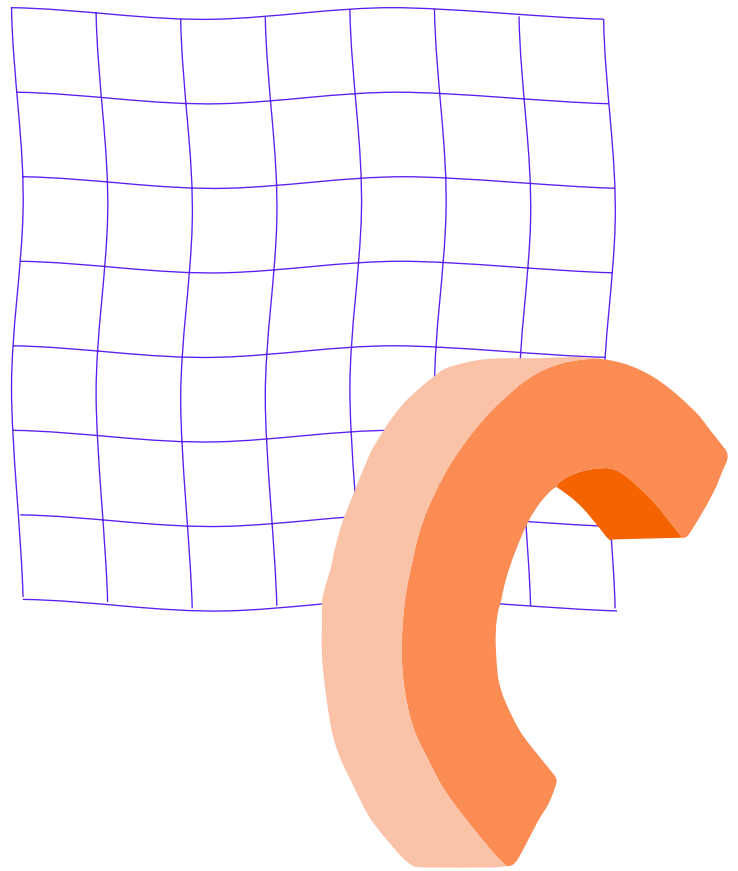
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Expert Q&A
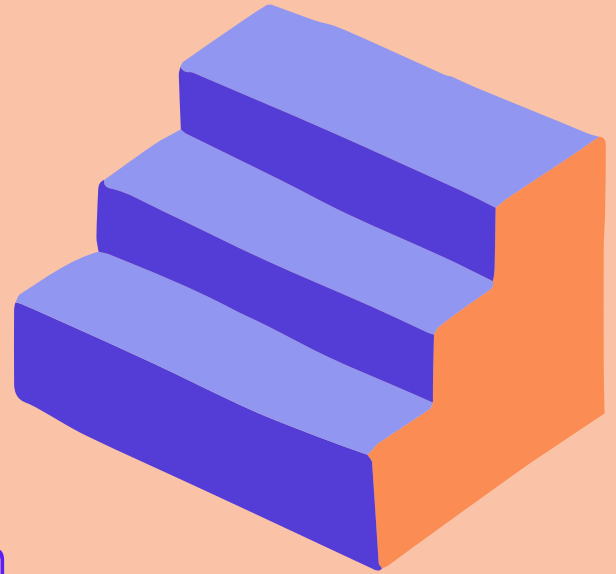
Three key questions with
Sebastián Valenzuela, Pontificia
Universidad Católica de Chile

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

The promotion of democratic forms of civic engagement helps to create a better world in two ways. First, it increases the quality of life of citizens and their communities by mobilizing individual and collective actions to help resolve problems that affect us all—problems that neither government nor an individual can resolve autonomously. Just as the work of parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and neighborhood associations can improve the quality of education and city life, so social media platforms that facilitate engagement in pro-democratic civic activities can improve users' quality

of life. Unfortunately, social media are also a platform for anti-democratic forms of engagement, such as participation in far-right, white supremacist, and anti-immigrant groups. Thus, social media need to promote "good" civic action, and by doing so, they can help improve the quality of life of a community.

Second, civic engagement hinges upon citizens being informed about opportunities to participate, and having the motivation and skills to do so. These antecedents, in turn, have important spillover effects on other dimensions of democratic citizenship. For instance, social media can indirectly pro-mote civic engagement by spreading news

about public issues and creating spaces for informal deliberation. News and discussion, in turn, can increase users' skills and motivation to join civic organizations and engage in other behaviors, such as voting in elections.

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?

Civic engagement is a multi-dimensional concept, which means that envisaging the perfect tech platform to maximize it would necessarily entail a multi-dimensional approach. First, it would increase the reach and visibility of organizations that promote the general well-being in ways that are consistent with the principles of liberal democracy (and, conversely, reduce the reach of organizations that are clearly against these principles). Second, it would facilitate the activities that enable users to directly participate with these organizations, such as joining, volunteering, online donations, and so forth, through a user-friendly interface. Third, it would promote the determinants of civic engagement, which are well covered by the other principles of Civic Signals: Promote Thoughtful Conversation, Cultivate Belonging, Build Bridges Between Groups, Strengthen Local Ties, Elevate Shared Concerns, Show Reliable Information, and Build Civic Competence. These principles, in turn, are building blocks of civic engagement. Platforms that promote them will promote civic engagement as well.

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

Platforms could produce metrics of civic engagement at the issue or organizational level, both from the supply- and demand-side, and at different geographic scales (e.g., local, national, international). At the issue level, platforms could identify topics of shared importance and display news stories and organizations working on these issues to increase users' awareness and interest in becoming mobilized. Platforms have done something similar for COVID-19. The task here would be to replicate this at a scale for other issues. Perhaps these issues should be rotated or selected using some sort of external audit. The reach and users' engagement with the content around these issues, in turn, could be measured over time. At the organizational level, platforms could track organizations that have a proven record of community service (via donations, awards, history, etc.) and make them more visible for users. Platforms could track the activities of these organizations online, including the information produced, the conversations they triggered among users, and the donations received. In terms of supply and demand, platforms may measure the evolution of followers, activities and donations received by these organizations, as well as the reach and conversation of users involved with these organizations. These efforts could be tailored to work at different scales (e.g., international and national, at first, then at the city level). Taken altogether, there wouldn't be a single metric but, rather, a family of metrics showing user engagement with civic organizations and activities.

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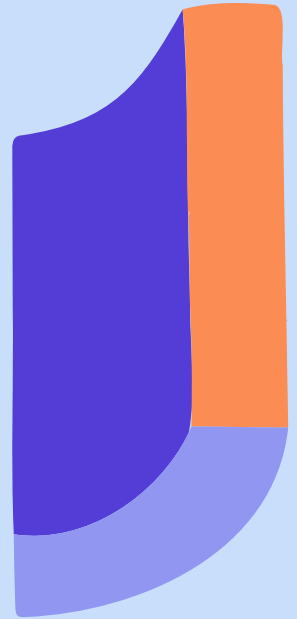
By Jay Jennings, Taeyoung Lee, Tamar Wilner, and Talia Stroud, Center for Media Engagement

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 "give citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems," 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; 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 signal was not rated as the most important by superusers of platforms in any country. Facebook superusers in Poland and Sweden gave the platform its highest rankings.

Importance ranking: Support civic action

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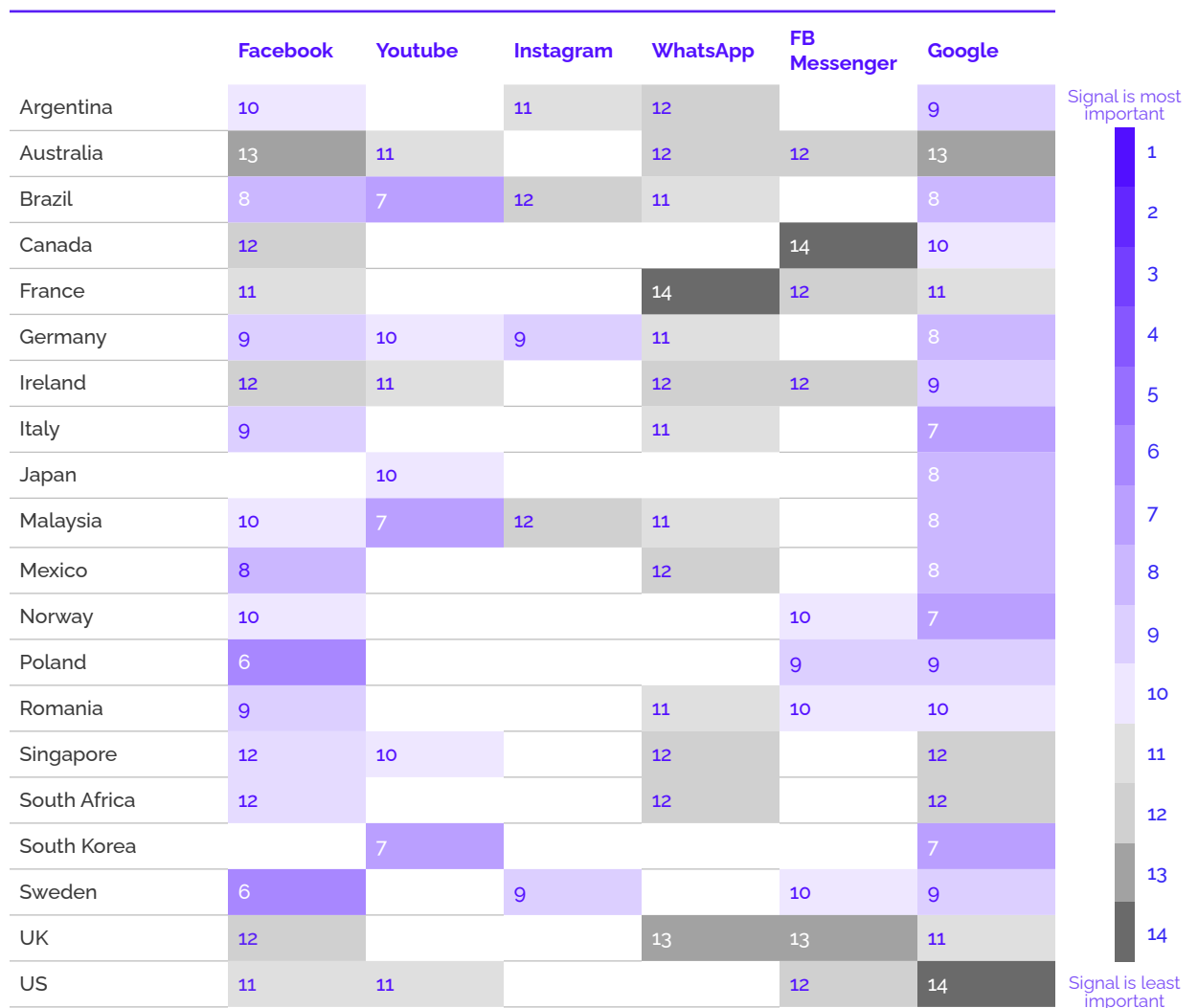
	Facebook	Youtube	Instagram	WhatsApp	FB Messenger	Google
Argentina	10		11	12		9
Australia	13	11		12	12	13
Brazil	8	7	12	11		8
Canada	12				14	10
France	11			14	12	11
Germany	9	10	9	11		8
Ireland	12	11		12	12	9
Italy	9			11		7
Japan		10				8
Malaysia	10	7	12	11		8
Mexico	8			12		8
Norway	10				10	7
Poland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

Signal is most important
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
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 that "giving citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems" was important for three of the five platforms: Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. For all three, 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).
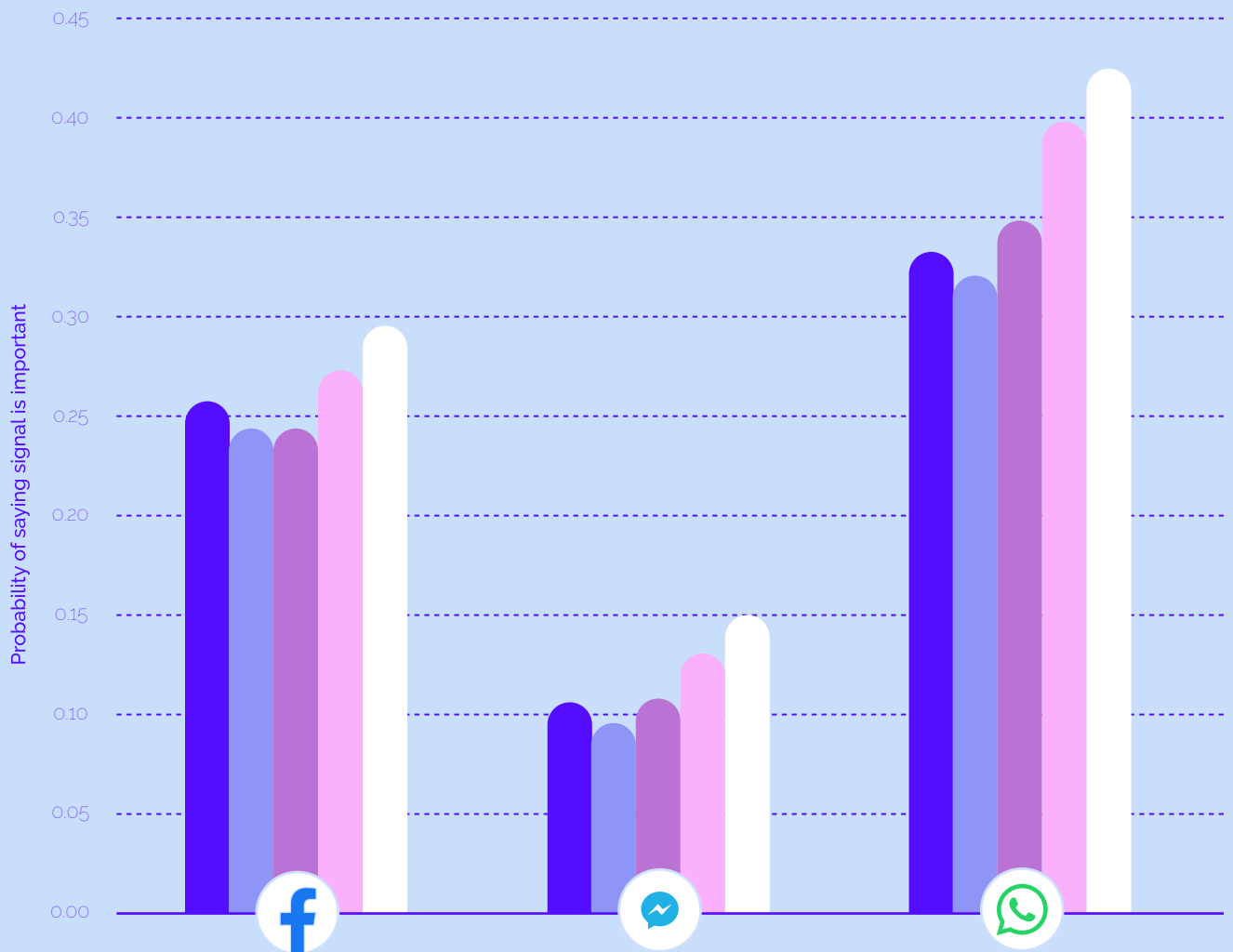
Importance of the Signal by Gender

Men and women differed in the importance they ascribed to "giving citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems" only for Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. For both platforms, men were more likely than women to say that the signal was important.
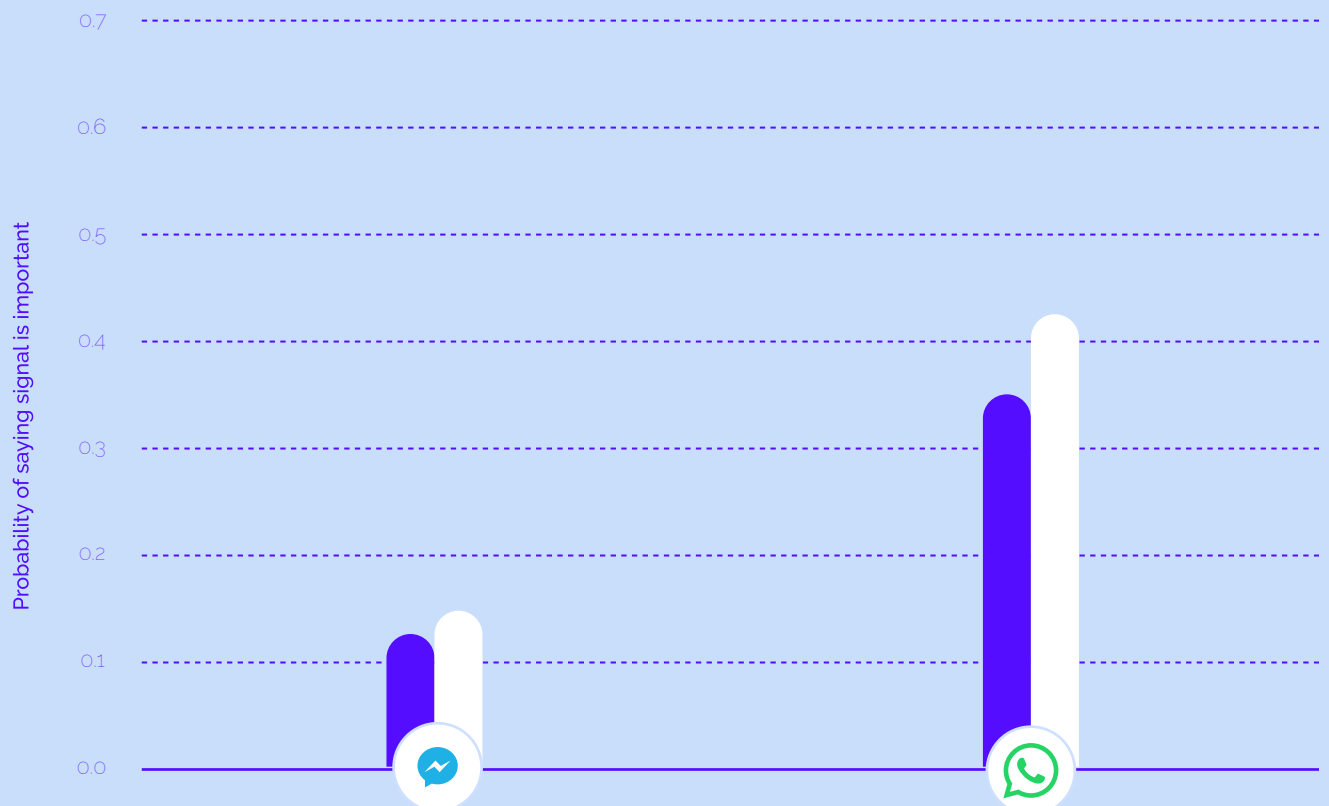
Importance of the Signal by Education

The importance of "giving citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems" varied by education only when superusers were evaluating Facebook and Facebook Messenger. For Facebook, those with high levels of education were more likely to think that the signal was important than those with lower levels of education. For Facebook Messenger, those with high levels of education were less likely than those with medium levels of education to think that the signal was important.

Probability of saying signal is important

Legend:
- Low
- Medium
- High
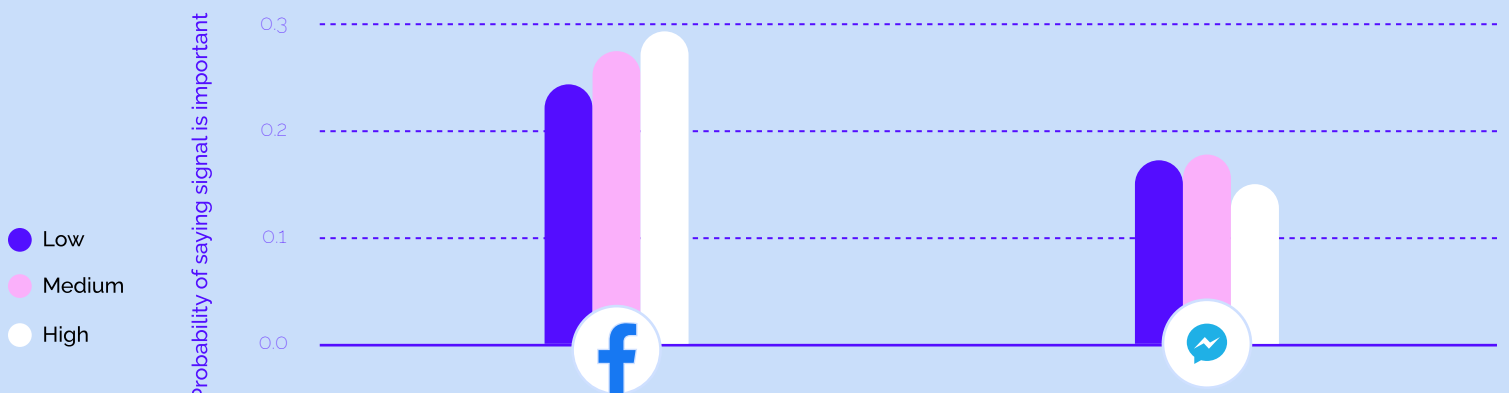
Importance of the Signal by Ideology[3]

The importance of "giving citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems" varied by ideology for all five of the platforms we examined. For Google and Facebook, superusers on the political left were more likely and those who didn't know their political ideology were less likely to say that the signal was important than those with other ideologies. For YouTube, those who didn't know their ideology were less likely to say that the signal was important compared to those with defined ideologies and those on the left and right were more likely to say that the signal was important compared to those with ideologies in the middle. For Facebook Messenger, those on the left were more likely to say that the signal was important compared to those with other ideologies. For WhatsApp, those who didn't know their ideology were less likely to say that the signal was important than those with other ideologies and those on the right were more likely to say it was important than those in the middle.

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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").

Legend:
- Left
- Middle
- Right
- Don't know

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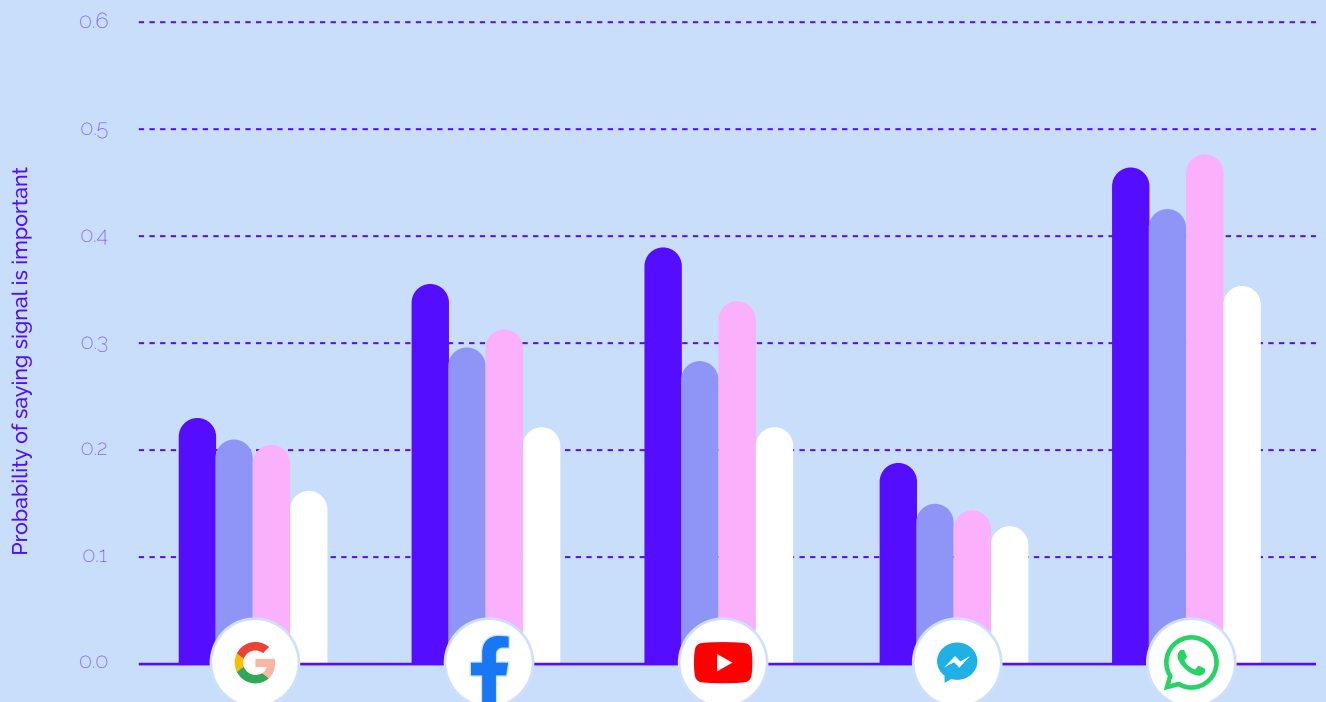
Importance of the Signal by Country

There was significant variation by country for all five of the platforms we examined based on how important people thought that "giving citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems" was. The chart below shows the probability of saying that the signal is important by platform and by country. Overall, survey respondents in South Africa, Malaysia, Brazil, and Romania and were more likely to endorse this signal as important across platforms. Fewer respondents endorsed the signal as important across platforms in Sweden, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, and Italy.
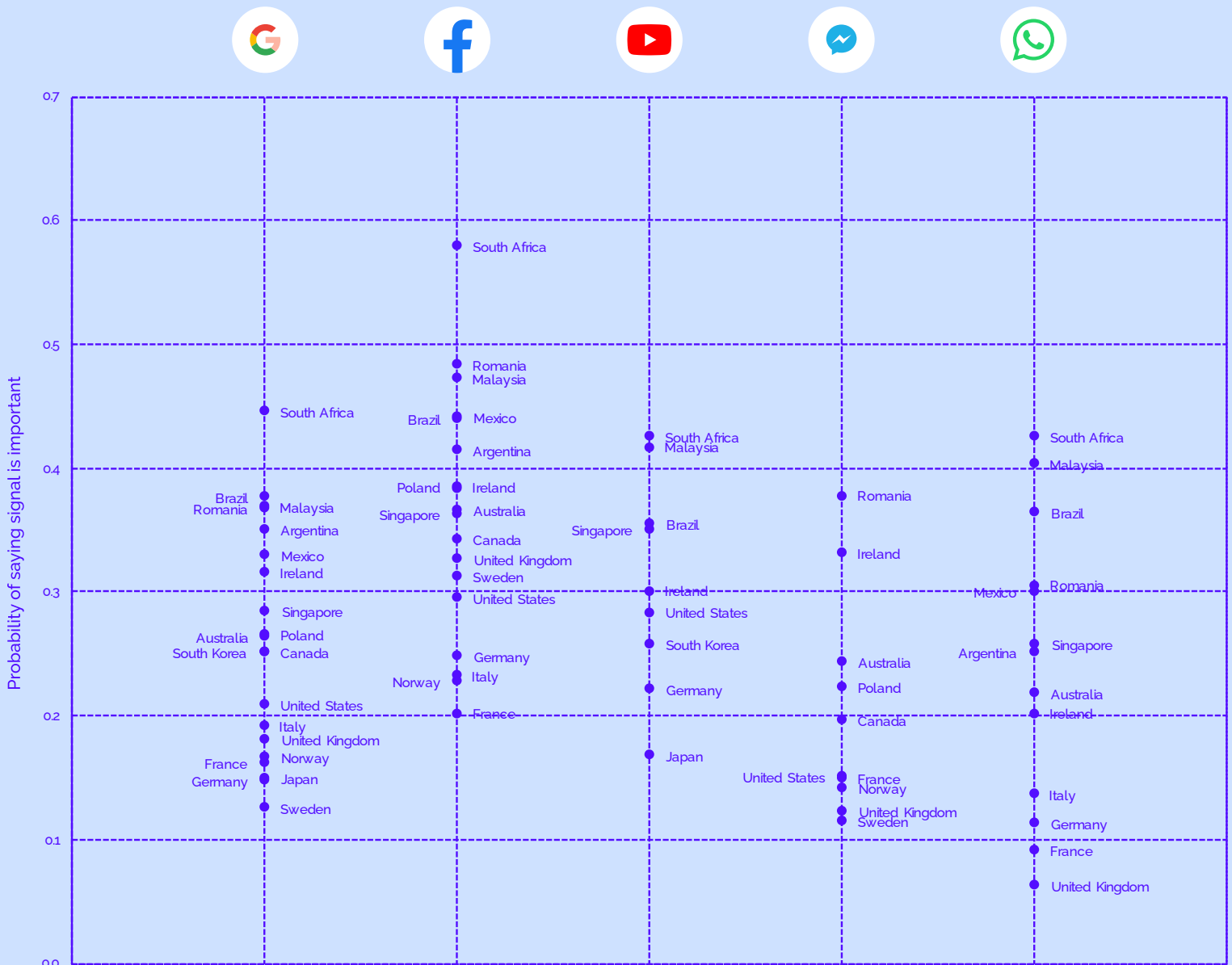
Platform Performance on the Signal

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. In most instances, superusers rated the platforms as performing neither well nor poorly. Facebook tended to earn slightly higher ratings than other platforms with respect to this signal.

Performance index: Support civic action

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	1.2		1.2	1.1		1.2
Australia	1.2	1.0		1.0	1.0	1.1
Brazil	1.3	1.3	1.1	1.2		1.2
Canada	1.2				1.0	1.0
France	1.0			1.0	1.0	1.0
Germany	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0		1.0
Ireland	1.2	1.1		1.0	1.1	1.2
Italy	1.1			1.0		1.0
Japan		1.1				1.0
Malaysia	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2		1.2
Mexico	1.2			1.1		1.2
Norway	1.1				1.0	1.0
Poland	1.3				1.1	1.2
Romania	1.3			1.0	1.2	1.2
Singapore	1.2	1.2		1.1		1.1
South Africa	1.3			1.1		1.2
South Korea		1.2				1.1
Sweden	1.1		1.0		1.0	1.0
UK	1.1			1.0	0.9	1.0
US	1.1	1.1			1.0	1.0

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.

Act: Support civic action

Platform Performance on the Signal by Age[4]

For four of the five platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp), older superusers rated the platforms' performance on "giving citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems" more positively than did younger superusers.

[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).
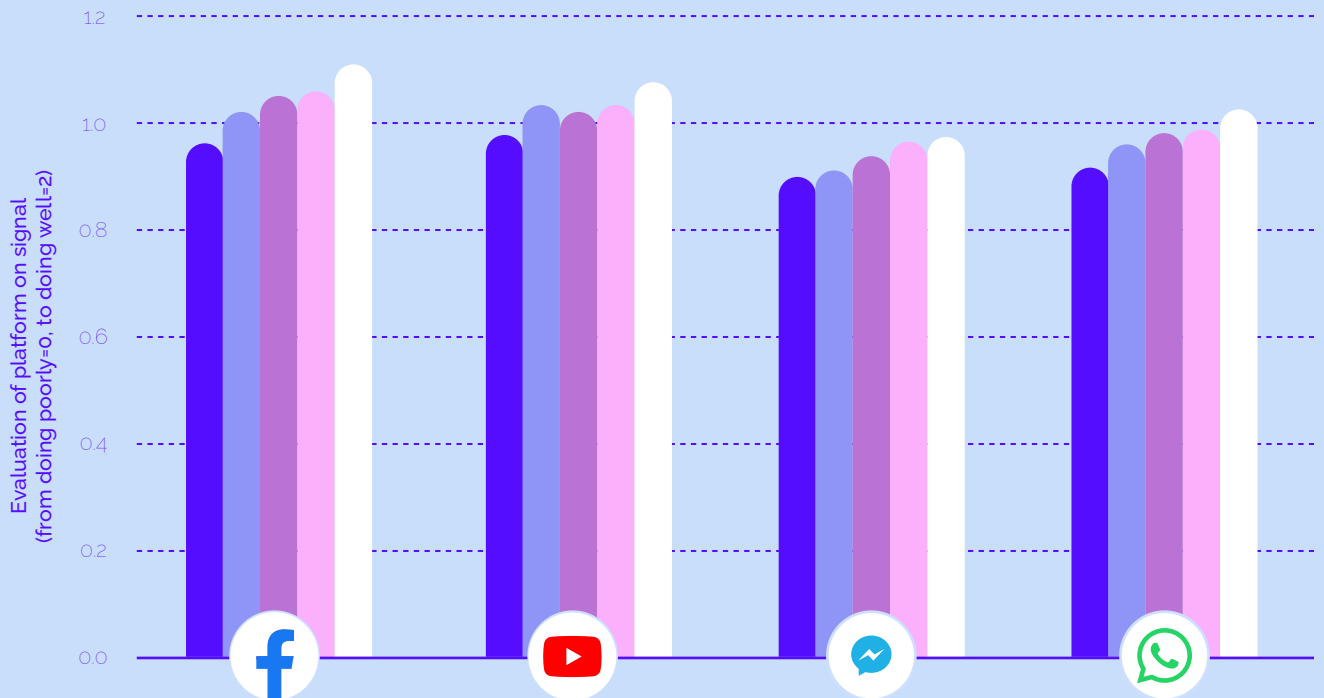
Platform Performance on the Signal by Gender

Gender predicted the platform's performance on "giving citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems" only for Google. Here, women rated the platform's performance better than did men.

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

1.2
1.0
0.8
0.6
0.4
0.2
0.0

● Female
○ Male
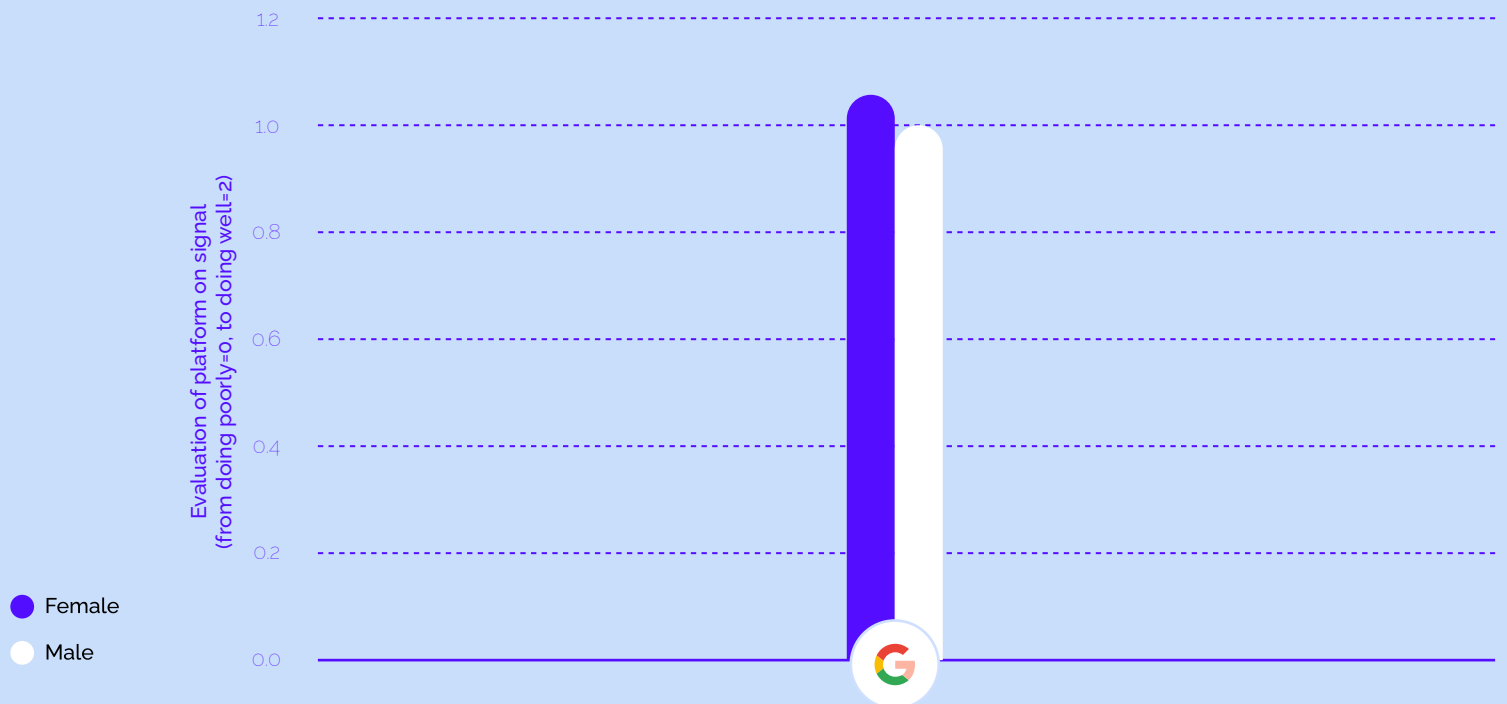
Platform Performance on the Signal by Ideology

For Google, those on the political right evaluated the platforms' performance on "giving citizens the opportunity to get involved in addressing society's problems" more positively than did those on the left. For YouTube, those on the left rated the platform's performance more positively than did those without an ideological affiliation. For WhatsApp, those on the left rated the platform's performance more negatively than did those with other ideologies. Those on the right also rated the platform's performance more positively than did those in the middle.

Legend:
- Left
- Middle
- Right
- Don't know

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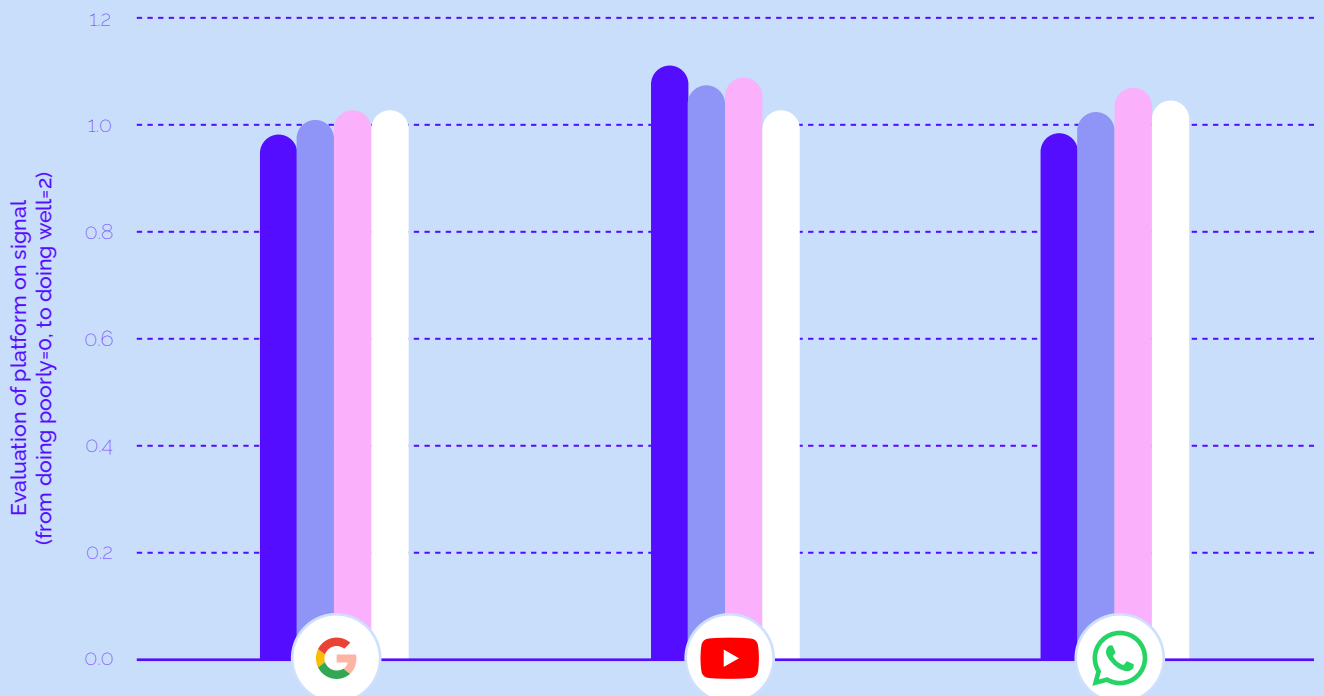
Platform Performance on the Signal by Country

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, and Brazil tended to say that the platforms performed better with respect to this signal than those in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, and the United States.

Act: Support civic action
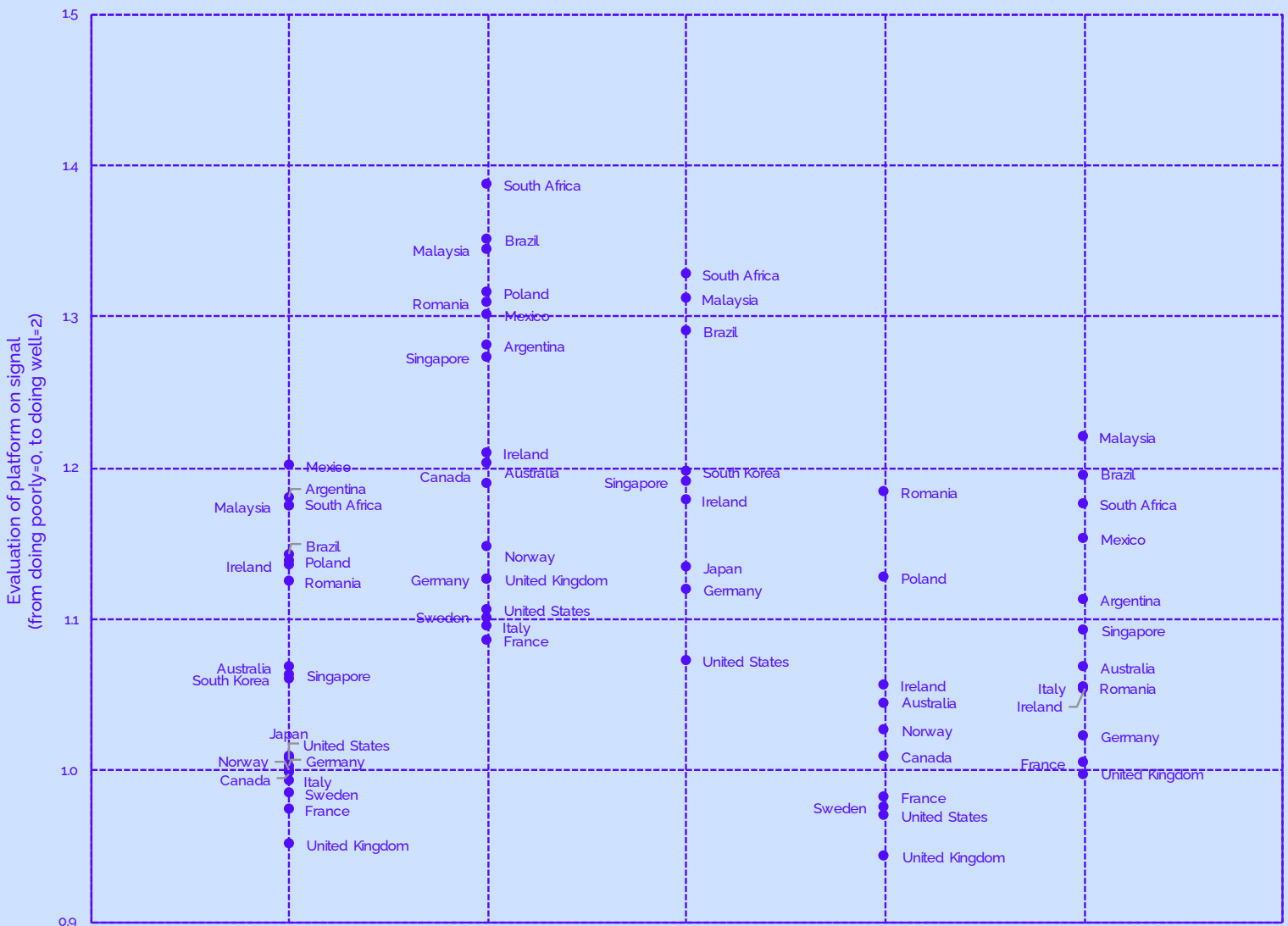
Focus group report
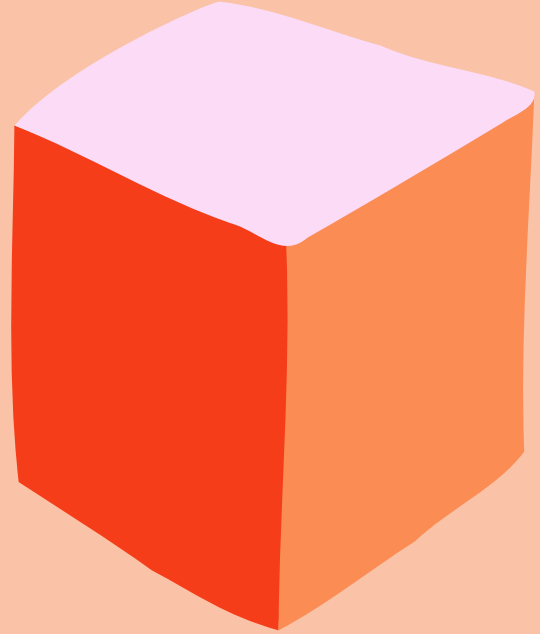
By Gina Masullo, Ori Tenenboim, and Martin Riedl,
Center for Media Engagement

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 generally saw civic engagement as favorable for society, but they raised concerns over the role of social media to support civic action. Some participants agreed that social media can help make it easier for people to get involved, but they warned platforms should not "tell" people what to think.

> " *Platforms could encourage civic engagement by making it 'easily accessible for people to donate to a specific cause or tying in those civic duties that you can do.'" – Brad, U.S. focus group participant*

Brad, of the U.S., suggested platforms could encourage civic engagement by making it "easily accessible for people to donate to a specific cause or tying in those

> **"Which civic action are you going to support in that regard?... Again it goes back to agenda; it goes to motive; it goes to which side. I feel like we're burdening them unnecessarily. Let us choose for ourselves which civil action." – Phumzile, South African focus group participant**

civic duties that you can do." Marlene, of Germany, focused on petitions: "I would also think that you can initiate petitions. And I would like this…Because the more people I can reach, the more people will sign this petition." Sarah, of Germany, talked about "reminding people that they have to vote for something," suggesting that "at least it cannot do any harm if people are reminded. Before a vote is forgotten and not enough people take part."

Deesha, of Malaysia, suggested that platforms can contribute to civic action just through the plethora of information and viewpoints they provide. "I just scroll," she said. "But from [a] particular situation, people learn too even without commenting. In a way, it improves civic action. People who want to say something, but don't dare. Seeing people giving that kind of response, it creates the civic awareness."

Other participants made the point that social media's role should be limited when it comes to civic engagement, so it doesn't

seem like platforms are telling people what to do. "I think that's tricky," noted Maria, of the U.S. Andrew, also of the U.S., expressed a similar view: "I think it's social media's job to provide a choice to support a specific civic action, whether it's donating or anything of that kind. But I don't think it's necessarily a specific purpose or job to actually say you guys support this or… donate." Tracy, also of the U.S., noted platforms can put themselves at risk if they urge too much civic action "because certain civic things are rather political, and people get very jumpy about their social media being too politically in one direction or another."

Phumzile, of South Africa, also was concerned about platforms getting too involved in supporting civic engagement because it might push certain viewpoints. "Which civic action are you going to support in that regard? she asked "… Again it goes back to agenda; it goes to motive; it goes to which side. I feel like we're burdening them unnecessarily. Let us choose for ourselves which civil action."

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.

Facebook

Gender	
Male	45%
Female	55%
Age	
18 - 24	6%
25 - 34	17%
35 - 44	19%
45 - 54	19%
55+	39%
Education	
Low	10%
Medium	41%
High	49%
Ideology	
Left	15%
Middle	45%
Right	21%
Don't know	18%

Instagram

Gender	
Male	34%
Female	66%
Age	
18 - 24	31%
25 - 34	32%
35 - 44	17%
45 - 54	9%
55+	12%
Education	
Low	7%
Medium	38%
High	55%
Ideology	
Left	15%
Middle	47%
Right	16%
Don't know	23%

LinkedIn

Gender	
Male	76%
Female	24%
Age	
18 - 24	5%
25 - 34	18%
35 - 44	21%
45 - 54	23%
55+	33%
Education	
Low	6%
Medium	24%
High	70%
Ideology	
Left	11%
Middle	60%
Right	21%
Don't know	9%

Pinterest

Gender	
Male	30%
Female	70%
Age	
18 - 24	6%
25 - 34	16%
35 - 44	20%
45 - 54	19%
55+	39%
Education	
Low	13%
Medium	45%
High	42%
Ideology	
Left	13%
Middle	50%
Right	19%
Don't know	19%

Reddit

Gender	
Male	74%
Female	26%
Age	
18 - 24	32%
25 - 34	38%
35 - 44	20%
45 - 54	6%
55+	3%
Education	
Low	9%
Medium	41%
High	50%
Ideology	
Left	38%
Middle	49%
Right	7%
Don't know	6%

Twitter

Gender	
Male	59%
Female	41%
Age	
18 - 24	19%
25 - 34	20%
35 - 44	20%
45 - 54	18%
55+	24%
Education	
Low	7%
Medium	33%
High	60%
Ideology	
Left	20%
Middle	49%
Right	18%
Don't know	14%

YouTube

Gender	
Male	59%
Female	41%
Age	
18 - 24	15%
25 - 34	19%
35 - 44	20%
45 - 54	17%
55+	29%
Education	
Low	9%
Medium	38%
High	53%
Ideology	
Left	14%
Middle	52%
Right	17%
Don't know	17%

Messenger

Gender	
Male	45%
Female	55%
Age	
18 - 24	9%
25 - 34	18%
35 - 44	18%
45 - 54	18%
55+	37%
Education	
Low	9%
Medium	50%
High	46%
Ideology	
Left	19%
Middle	42%
Right	22%
Don't know	17%

KakaoTalk

Gender	
Male	50%
Female	50%
Age	
18 - 24	12%
25 - 34	17%
35 - 44	18%
45 - 54	17%
55+	35%
Education	
Low	2%
Medium	34%
High	64%
Ideology	
Left	10%
Middle	67%
Right	13%
Don't know	10%

Snapchat

Gender	
Male	44%
Female	56%
Age	
18 - 24	39%
25 - 34	25%
35 - 44	15%
45 - 54	8%
55+	13%
Education	
Low	12%
Medium	53%
High	35%
Ideology	
Left	18%
Middle	46%
Right	17%
Don't know	19%

		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%

Act: Support civic action

Logo glossary

Social media

Facebook

Instagram

LinkedIn

Pinterest

Reddit

Twitter

YouTube

Messaging

Facebook Messenger

KakaoTalk

Snapchat

Telegram

WhatsApp

Search engines

Bing

Google

Yahoo