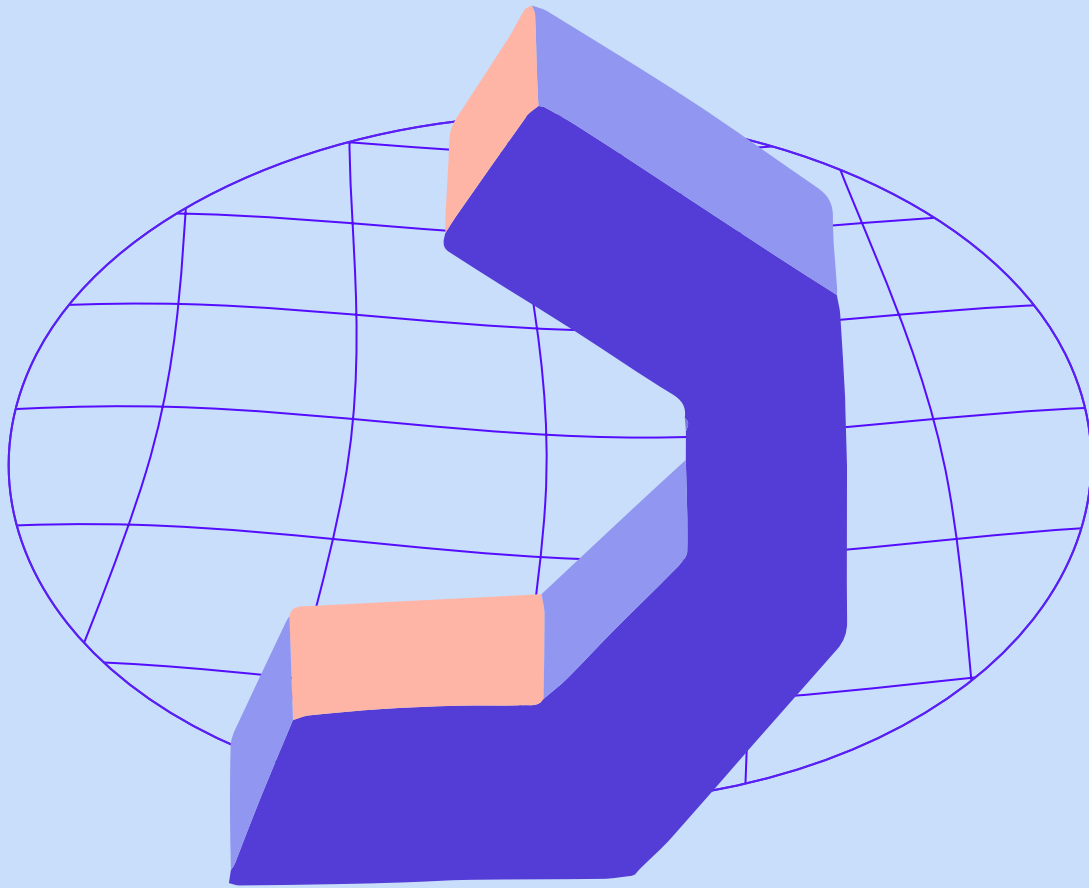


Build bridges between groups



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



Building bridges between groups means forming social connections that allow information and resources to travel between groups that might not ordinarily connect.

Why It Matters

People are all part of numerous groups, whether based on location, religion, race/ethnicity, or political ideology. Bridges can help improve interpersonal relationships and increase social capital. Bridges can also help to diffuse information across networks. Such diffusion can be crucial in moments of crisis, and can help alleviate social concerns like political polarization, dehumanization and even health disparities across communities.

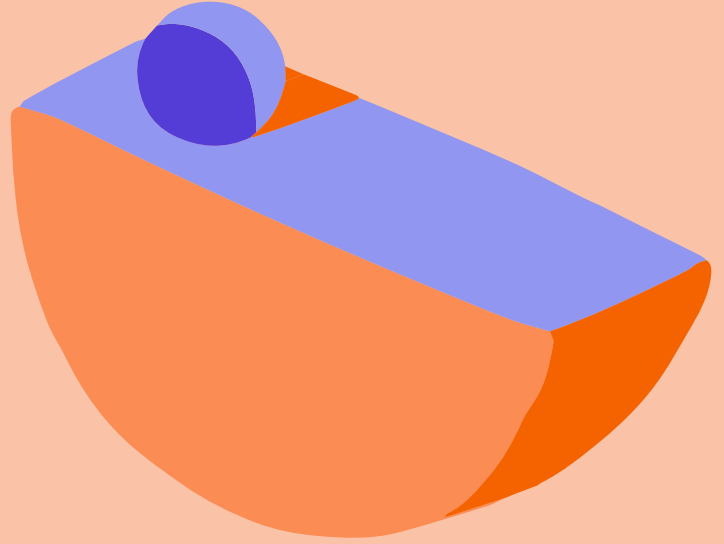


This is the intention of social media. Different interest groups can group together and network.”
– Karla, German focus group participant

Putting the Signal Into Practice

- Research by communication professors Magdalena Wojcieszak and Diana Mutz finds that online groups formed around a shared interest like sports fandom are more likely to create bridges across political beliefs than groups formed specifically around ideology.
- Sports have been known to bridge ethnic and religious divides. The non-profit PeacePlayers works with youth in conflict zones such as Israel and Northern Ireland, where its basketball program was the first point of cross-group interaction for 91% of participants. <https://www.peaceplayers.org/>
- In Germany, the newspaper ZEIT Online created the platform Germany Talks. This platform matched over a thousand people with their ideological opposites, and provided them with guidance on how to have a productive conversation. Participants then organized their own face-to-face meetings, and said they were surprised at the number of issues on which they found agreement with their partner. The effort is now an international one, called My Country Talks: <https://www.mycountrytalks.org/>
- Tonika Johnson, a photojournalist with Chicago's City Bureau Journalism Lab, connected residents of the North and South sides of Chicago to discuss the residents' different experiences in their respective neighborhoods. The conversation helped build empathy, and encouraged activism for improving neighborhoods and reducing segregation in Chicago. <https://mediaengagement.org/research/making-strangers-less-strange/>
- Weaving Community is a movement that encourages Americans to form connections across lines of difference to help each other through the COVID-19 pandemic, using social media posts, video chats, and more. <https://weaving.us/>
- The Bridge Alliance provides this list of several dozen organizations that work to bring people together across ideological divides. https://www.bridgealliance.us/our_members_bridging_ideological_divides

Literature review



By Emily Van Duyn,
University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign
With thanks to Joe Phua,
University of Georgia

What the Signal Is

People are part of groups, both offline and in digital space. Groups can be geographic, such as one's neighborhood or local community. They can be social or demographic, like a certain racial/ethnic group or a religious group, or political, like a particular political ideology or party. People in a group may not have met each other, but share an identifying bond through their similar group affiliation.

Because there are so many groups and so many people identify with different ones, many groups are not connected. For exam-

ple, someone from a certain religious group may not know of or interact with someone from another religious group. This disconnection can be problematic. Disconnection between groups can create an unequal distribution of information or resources, which can lead to prejudice between groups and even differences in their overall health.

Groups can be connected via one individual or through several connections across various members. These connections can be strong or weak, entirely offline, entirely digital, or a mixture. Importantly, connections between groups operate as social bridges—allowing information and resources to travel between groups.

The idea of connections between groups is related to a number of concepts from research on social networks. Early social network researchers Barry Wellman and Steve Berkowitz classified people as "nodes," who are connected to each other by "ties" to form a "network." Ties can vary in terms of strength, or the degree to which each individual is invested in or reliant on the other. A strong tie between nodes often corresponds with more shared ties within the network of those two nodes. In contrast, two nodes sharing a weak tie often have few overlapping ties within their network. In discussing connections between groups, we're talking about the formation of weak ties, and how they can potentially grow into strong ties.

Strong ties also have a strong line of social capital, or social resources like connections or trust. Different networks and ties produce social capital in different ways. For instance, political scientist Robert Putnam distinguished between two types of capital: "bridging" and "bonding," in which the former brings "people together of a different sort" while the latter "brings people together of a similar sort."

Because bridging capital builds connections between people of different networks, it affects one's knowledge of those from which one is different. On the other hand, because bonding capital involves connections within an existing network, it enhances knowledge of others with which one is already familiar. As a result, when we think of connections between groups, we are speaking of *bridging ties* and resulting *bridging social capital*.

People who serve as bridges between two networks are known as network "brokers." Importantly, brokers wield their influence between groups, rather than within them.

This means that brokers are able to help fill structural holes, or bridge networks that do not overlap. They help to connect at least two networks, and therefore can create bridging social capital including access to information or other resources not already available in one's network.

In this signal, we concentrate on connections between major demographic, political, and social groups. We note that this signal is not about building bridges to minor groups that are based around ideas that are hateful or glorify violence against others – we are thinking here of white supremacists and terrorists, to name two prominent examples. The beliefs of such groups are socially unacceptable, and we are not arguing that bridging ties and bridging social capital need to be strengthened in those instances.

Related Concepts

This signal is similar to [Cultivate Belonging](#), which we describe as "giving people the chance to feel connected to other people and groups." The most important difference between the two signals is that belongingness is about in-group affiliation – in other words, strong ties. [Build Bridges Between Groups](#), on the other hand, focuses on weak ties. Those who have strong ties already have many nodes in common in their networks, while with the current signal, we are seeking to improve the relationship between those who don't share many connections already.

Similarly, we concentrate here on bridging ties and bridging social capital, and not on their bonding counterparts. Bonding enhances connection with those who are already familiar, whereas the importance of

connections between groups lies precisely in bringing together unfamiliar collections of people.

Why It's Important

Connections between groups, or building bridges between networks, is important for a number of reasons. First, there is some evidence that bridges can help improve interpersonal relationships and increase social capital. For example, digital communication scholar Nicole Ellison and colleagues found that for those with low satisfaction in offline relationships and low self-esteem, Facebook can increase bridging social capital and consequently offer the potential for interaction. Specifically, interactivity on Facebook, such as replies and commenting, can increase bridging social capital by exposing and offering a chance for interaction with "friends of friends." Such increases in bridging social capital can have civic implications. Political science and international relations scholar Marco Giugni and colleagues found that Muslim immigrants to Switzerland were more likely to participate politically if they were involved in cross-ethnic organizations, compared to those who were involved in intra-ethnic organizations and those not involved in any organizations.

Second, and perhaps most important, is the promising role of network bridges to diffuse information across different networks. The role of information diffusion is reflective of sociologist Mark Granovetter's "strength of weak ties" argument, which posits that people outside of your core network are more likely to have information you do not possess. As a result, "whatever is to be diffused can reach a larger number of

people, and traverse greater social distance (i.e., path length), when passed through weak ties rather than strong."

The ability of bridges between networks to diffuse diverse information becomes particularly consequential when that information is important. For example, network bridging can be crucial in moments of crisis. Sociologists Daniel Aldrich and Michelle Meyer documented how bridges between networks aid individuals in disaster contexts by providing information about external resources. You can read more about strengthening information resources to address crises in our literature review on [Boost Community Resilience](#).

Diverse information diffusion can also help to alleviate contemporary social concerns like outgroup dehumanization (discussed in [Encourage the Humanization of Others](#)), political polarization, and even health disparities across communities. For example, limited political information, or information that comes from only one side, can exacerbate political polarization and further entrench individuals in their existing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Exposure to more diverse information can help to reduce polarization. Exposure to diverse viewpoints may help alleviate the extent to which members of one party disagree with and dislike members from another party, media researcher Jae Kook Lee and colleagues wrote. Diverse information can also aid public health. Individuals who have more bridging connections and more bridging social capital within their local community are more likely to receive health information, sociologist Lijun Song and cognitive neuroscientist Tian-Yun Chang found. In fact, those with more local bridging connections report better overall health, according to a

study by environmental psychologist Wouter Poortinga, and another by public policy researchers Simon Szreter and Michael Woolcock.

How We Can Move the Needle

Given the value of connections between groups and information that bridges social networks, it is important to understand how to increase the number of network brokers – or at least how to highlight existing brokers. Political scientist Danielle Allen referred to this as an effort to “maximize bridging ties.” This generally requires strong institutions, such as schools, political bodies, and the military, because these are where bridging ties are typically located. She underscores the importance of looking at how communities and institutions are structured when considering how to build and capitalize on bridging connections. For example, she argues, preschools should mix children from different economic groups; planners should prioritize mixed-income housing; college admissions should seek geographic diversity at the zip code level; and a new approach to federalism should educate citizens in “the interest positions of others.”

Bridging ties are also important to consider when thinking about the digital space. Online social networks can yield more bridges between networks because they afford different connection strategies, the barrier to entry is lower, and social identity is less salient online. Studying Asia-Pacific college students in the U.S., communication researchers Joe Phua and Seung-A Annie Jin found that use of social media was associated with the creation and maintenance of bridging social capital, even more than bonding social capital.

Political scientist Pippa Norris argued that digital bridging connections are especially likely because online groups expose individuals to ideologically or socially different others. That is, people are more likely to form bridging connections online because there is more opportunity for different people to meet.

This may be especially true when the online group is based on some other similarity. For instance, research by communication professors Magdalena Wojcieszak and Diana Mutz found that online groups formed around some shared interest or trait other than political ideology (e.g. ethnic/racial identity, sports fandom) are more likely to create bridges across political ideology than groups that are formed specifically around political ideology.

Research on online social networks has also looked at the effectiveness of brokers for information diffusion online. Google researcher David Huffaker explored the role of brokering social influence in online groups. He found that frequency of communication, emotional and assertive language, credibility, and centrality within the network (the degree to which that person was the source of many connections) affect how much influence the bridge has within the network. In other words, the ability and success of information brokerage between groups depends on how important that person is to each of the networks. Brokers that are central to both networks are better at diffusing diverse information.

Beyond social scientific research, there have been practical efforts to build and capitalize on bridges between groups. For example, Tonika Johnson, a photojournalist with Chicago's City Bureau Journalism Lab, connected residents of the North and South sides of Chicago to discuss the residents' different ex-

periences in their respective neighborhoods. The conversation helped build empathy, and encouraged activism for improving neighborhoods and reducing segregation in Chicago. In Germany, the newspaper ZEIT Online created the platform Germany Talks. This platform matched over a thousand people with their ideological opposites, and provided them with guidance on how to have a productive conversation. Participants then organized their own face-to-face meetings, and said they were surprised at the number of issues on which they found agreement with their partner. More than 20 newsrooms across Europe partnered with ZEIT Online to expand the project, and now any news organization can register with My Country Talks.

How to Measure

Bridging ties and bridging capital have been measured using survey items such as communication scholar Dmitri Williams's Internet Social Capital Scales. The scales focus on the role of online interactions in facilitating diverse thinking and perspectives. For instance, one item asks respondents how strongly they agree that, "Interacting with people online/offline makes me interested in what people unlike me are thinking."

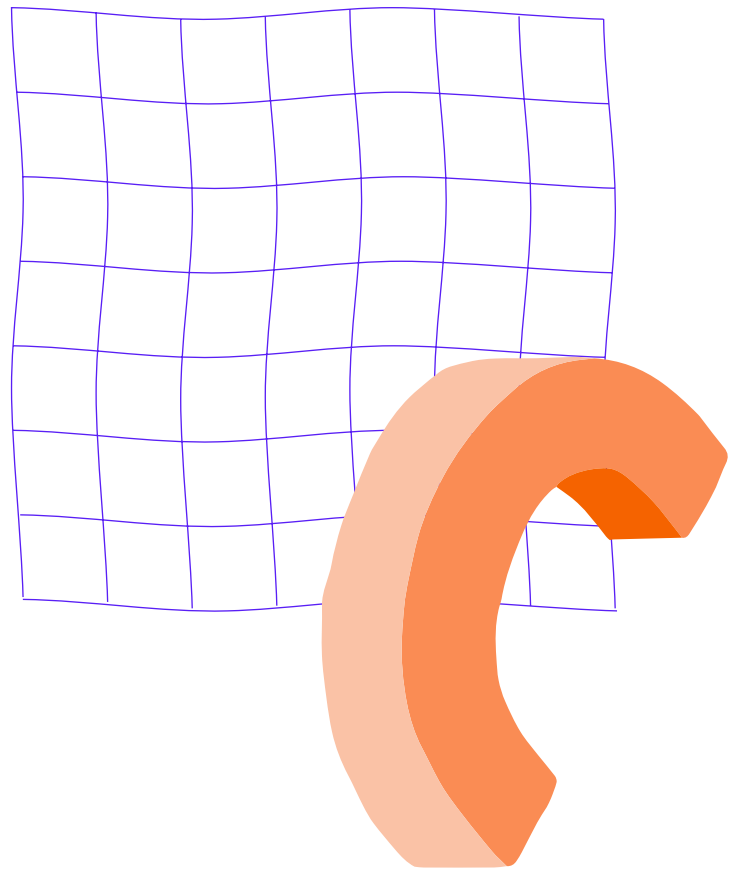
More recent research has posed a number of modifications to this scale. For example, Nicole Ellison and colleagues adapted Williams's scale by adding three items related to context, which in this case was their college campus. As a result, respondents were asked to focus on a specific network rather than "online" or "offline" more generally. In 2014, Ellison and her coauthors again adapted the scale to focus on perceptions of resources in the respondents'

networks. This time, they asked respondents to "only think about Facebook Friends when responding to the 10 items." These changes reflect the continual sharpening of survey measures aimed at capturing connections between groups.

Beyond survey data, the degree of bridging ties and the influence of network brokers has often been assessed using network analysis. Some of these studies have looked at self-reported relationships across a network using an approach developed by sociologist Peter Marsden called the "name generator" method. For instance, sociologist Ronald Burt used this method when he asked managers of a company to report the names of individuals with whom they had discussed ideas for improving supply chain. Using these data, he constructed networks within the company and identified which individuals served as discussion bridges between networks, following how bridges brokered information from node to node across the company.

Others have looked for bridges between groups in existing online network data using network analysis software. For example, software developed by professor Stephen Borgatti and colleagues, including KeyPlayer and UCINET, can identify the centrality of nodes within a network and bridges between networks. Researcher David Huffaker used network data to measure brokering as a degree of centrality, what he called "betweenness centrality." To do this, he takes the proportional distance between the bridge and any two nodes in separate networks. Identifying who is central to both networks and bridges the networks can also help researchers identify who is most likely to diffuse information successfully between networks.

These two approaches, survey research and network analysis, offer different information about connections between groups. Survey research is especially helpful in identifying *how* and *if* online social networks have bridges while network analysis is helpful in determining who bridges networks and *who* is likely to successfully and quickly diffuse information across these networks.



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Expert Q&A



Three key questions with **Joe Phua**, University of Georgia

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

Human beings are inherently social animals. Throughout history, humans have relied on their social networks to learn about important cultural values, beliefs and norms. The rise of the media in the 20th century then allowed for large-scale transmission of information and news to the masses. In recent years, social media platforms, along with other internet-based communication technologies, have become dominant avenues for people to find out about what is going on around them. Social media, in particular, allows users to connect with their online social networks, forging weak

ties with new acquaintances from remote areas around the world, while fostering strong ties with close friends and family. Bridging connections between groups are important because they allow for different and diverse news and information to spread from one group to another, thereby increasing the heterogeneity of viewpoints about various important topics including political, religious, health, and social issues, among others. Because weak ties allow for new innovations, including information and resources, to diffuse into groups, they help to prevent the emergence of echo chambers and filter bubbles, as can happen when one only connects online with others who have similar values, beliefs and norms.

Disconnections between groups can lead to unequal distribution of resources, as well as misunderstandings between in-groups and their relevant out-groups. As such, it is important for social media platforms and other Internet-based communication technologies to foster connections between groups, so as to help create a more equitable, just, and conscientious world for everyone.

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?

In order to maximize the principle of connections between groups, social media, messaging and web search platforms should focus on fostering weak ties that can help information and resources to diffuse from one group to another. Specifically, I would envisage social media and messaging platforms including news and information from diverse sources on their sites, in addition to encouraging their users to connect with others from different social groups via algorithmic and machine learning techniques. Additionally, I would suggest that social media and messaging platforms develop ways to connect people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, in order to foster understandings between these groups. For web search platforms to maximize connections between groups, I would envisage a system whereby search results include news, information, and resources which not only fulfill individual users' web search needs, but also allow them to connect with others from different, disparate groups. As such, people may be exposed to different and diverse viewpoints about particular topics for which they conduct web searches.

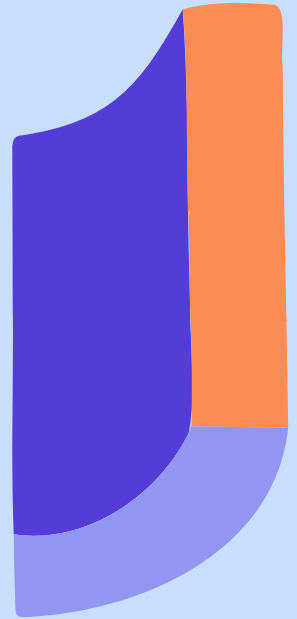
How would you measure a messaging, social media, or web search platform's progress against this principle?

There are a few ways by which I would measure a messaging, social media, or web search platform's progress against the principle of connections between groups. First, I would measure their progress via the degree to which they help individual users to connect with others from different groups and social networks online and offline. Weak ties primarily allow for the diffusion of innovations from one group to another, and may also help individuals to build bridging social capital. Hence, it would be important for these Internet-based communication technologies to encourage and foster the formation of weak ties and bridging social capital, in order to build connections between groups. Second, I would examine their abilities and capabilities to help and encourage their users to access diverse news, information, and resources which they otherwise will not be able to get from their immediate, close social connections. By adding channels and avenues for individuals to gain access to different sources of news and information about topics important to them, these Internet-based communication technologies can aid in helping people from different groups to understand one another, thereby increasing the likelihood of developing commonalities and connections between these groups. Third, I would also look at the degree to which these Internet-based communication technologies are able to identify and empower central "nodes," or individuals in various social networks, that can help to connect others from different groups. Since news and information are often conveyed from person-to-person in social networks, opinion leaders and other "central" figures within groups may possess

the ability to encourage uptake of particular new innovations and behaviors in their groups. Influencers and influencer marketing are already prevalent on social media platforms. In order to maximize connections between groups, these internet-based communication technologies should continue to harness the power of these influential individuals to connect individuals from different groups, and to act as bridges through which diverse news, information and resources flow between groups. A truly successful messaging, social media, or web search platform should be able to bridge individuals and groups across the racial, gender, sexual, political, religious, and

national divides, so as to bring about a civic society and public sphere in which people from different groups can all participate fully and equally.

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 “provide opportunities for different groups to interact,” and asked people to assess how well the platforms perform with respect to this signal. People were only asked about the platforms for which they are “superusers,” by which we mean people who identify the platform as their most used social media, messaging, or search platform.

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

We did this analysis for five platforms: Google, Facebook, YouTube, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp.¹ Only statistically significant results are shown and discussed.

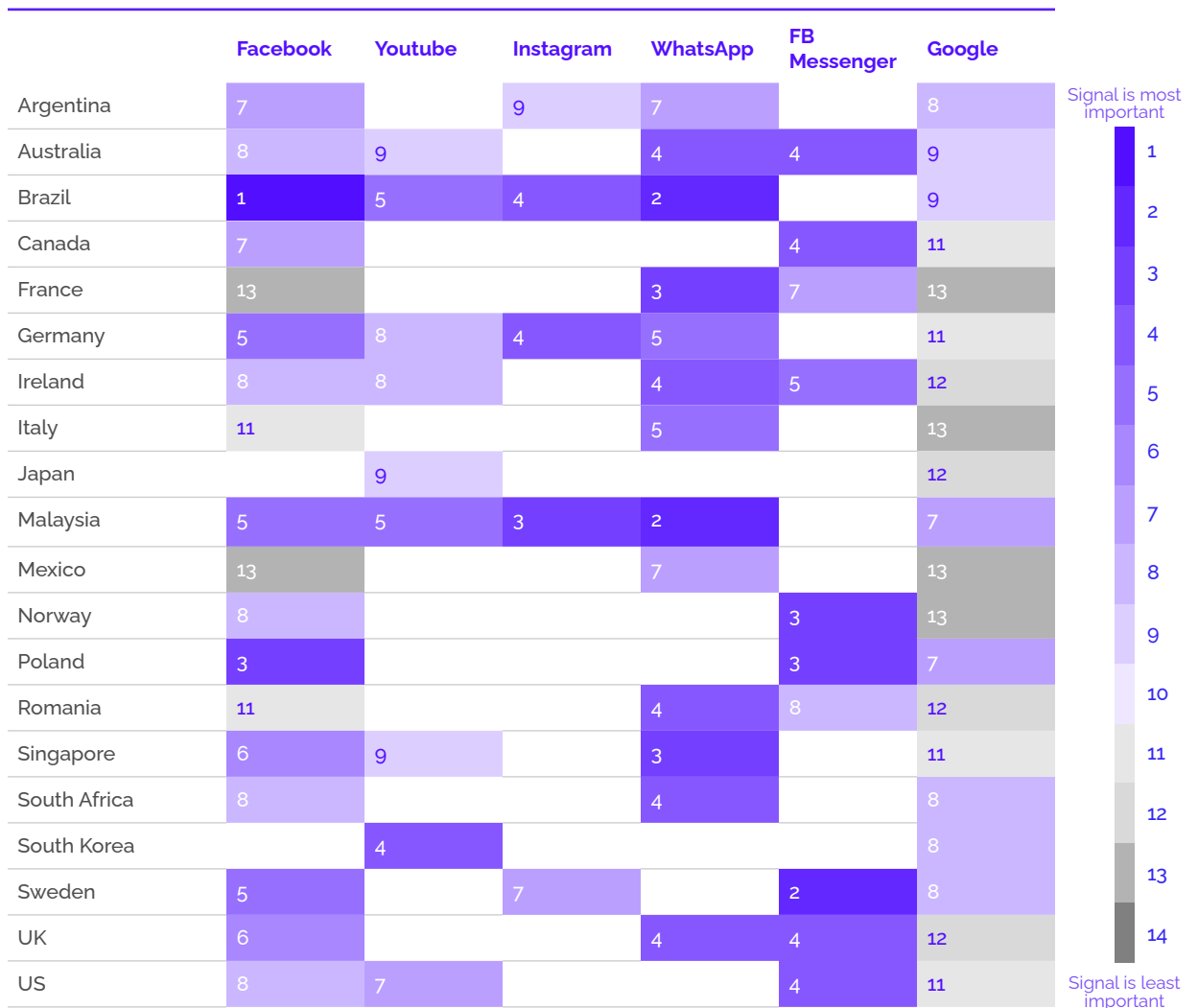
¹ The analyses include only countries where at least 200 people responded that the social/ message/ search platform was the one that they use most frequently, and then only those platforms where we had data for at least 1,000 people. For Google, this includes all 20 countries. For Facebook, this includes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

Importance of the Signal

We first examined whether platform superusers thought that the signal was important. This signal was ranked as most important of the 14 signals by Facebook superusers in Brazil.

Importance ranking: Bridge connections between groups

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.

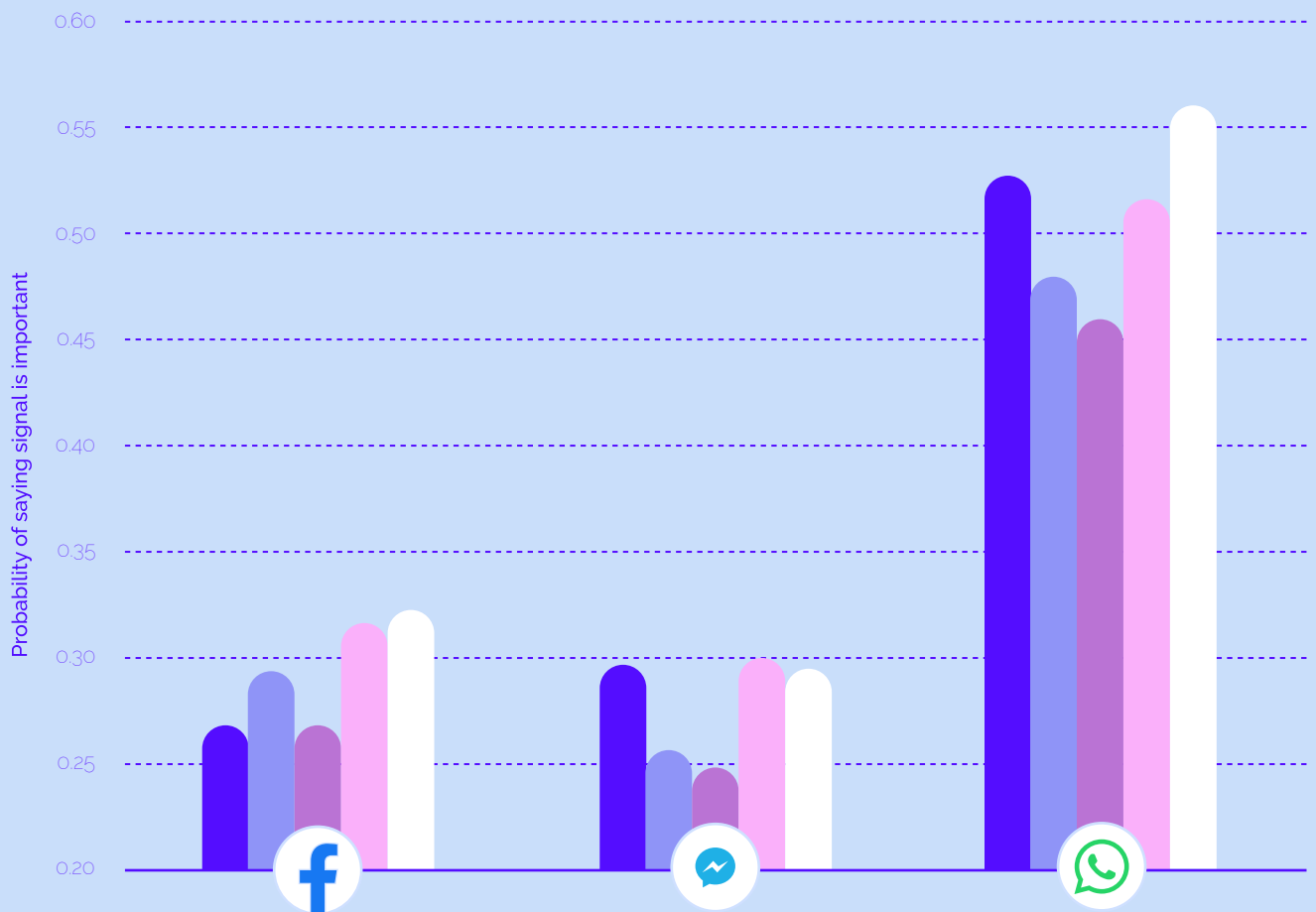


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording: Which of the following do you think it is important for [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] to do? Please select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

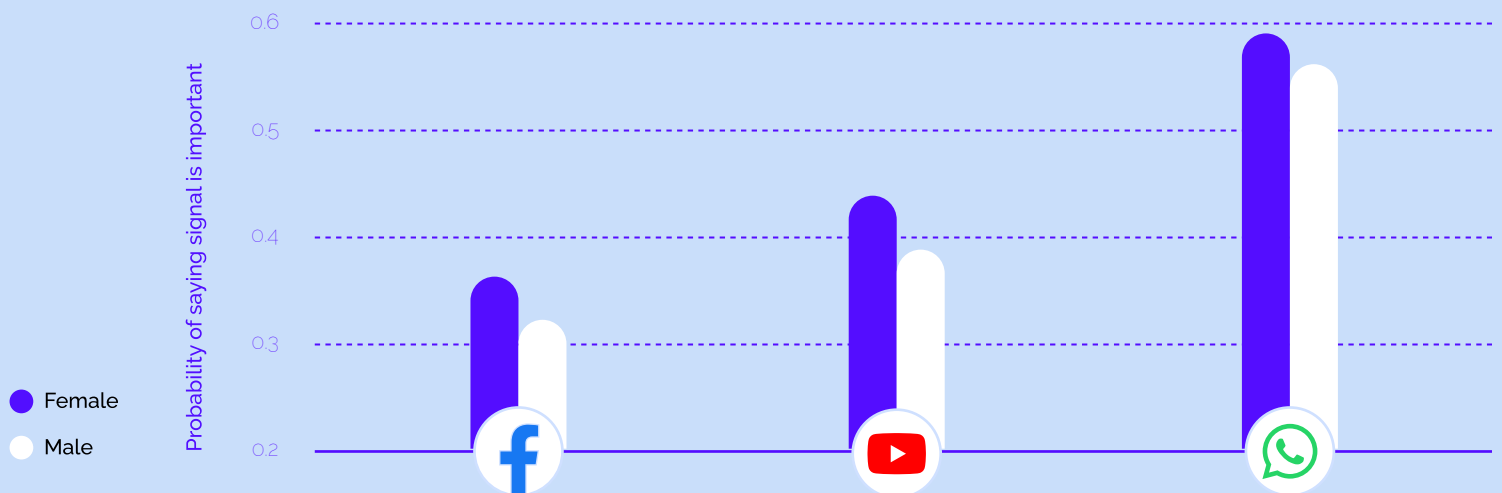
Age predicted whether superusers thought it was important to “provide opportunities for different groups to interact” for three platforms: Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp. For Facebook, those 55+ rated the signal as more important than those 18-24. For Facebook Messenger, superusers aged 18-24 and 45+ rated the signal as more important than those 25-44. For WhatsApp, those younger and older rated the platform as performing better than those in the middle.

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).



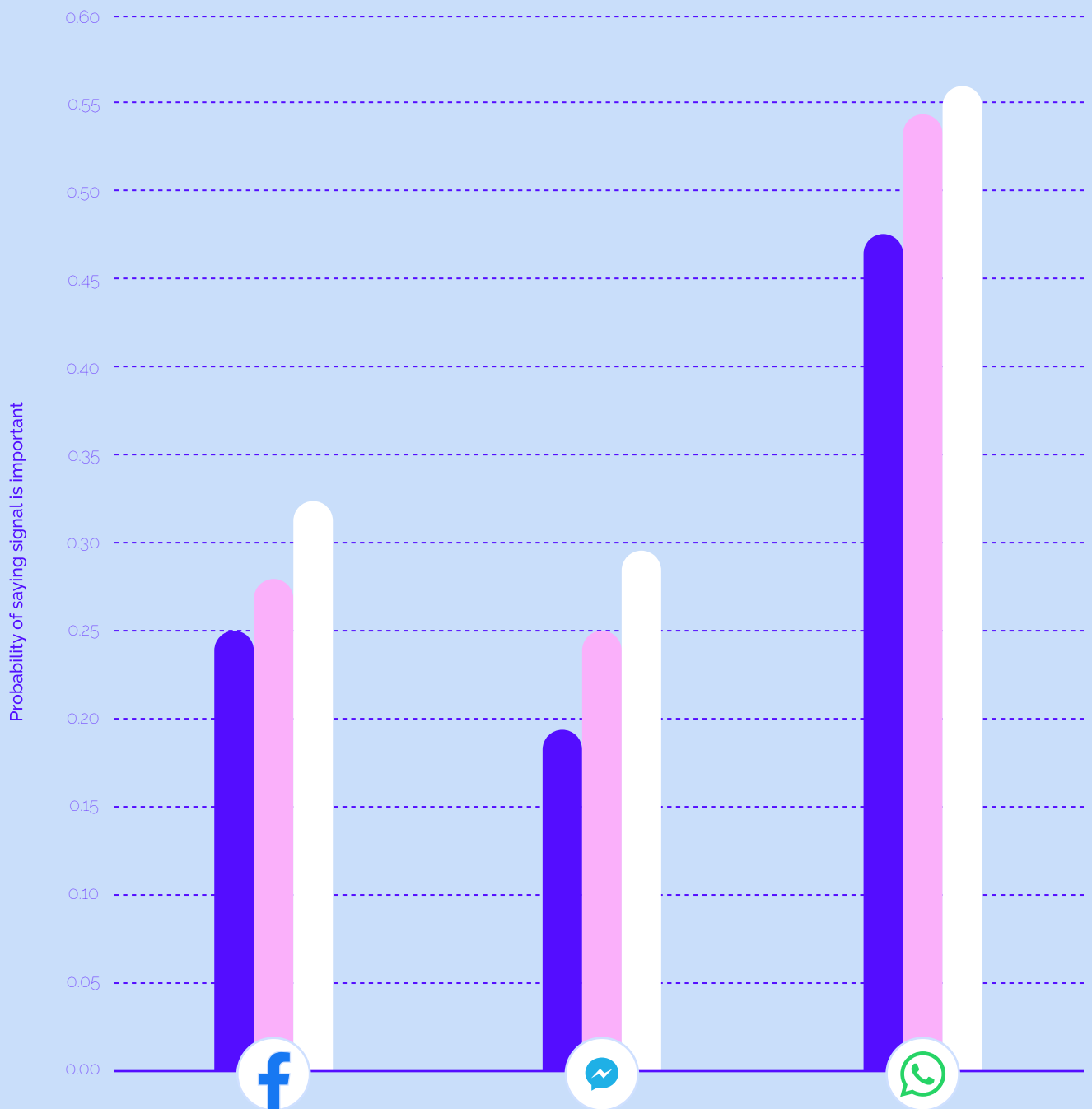
Importance of the Signal by Gender

Men and women differed in the importance they ascribed to building bridges across groups for three platforms: Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. For each of these platforms, women were more likely than men to say that the signal was important.



Importance of the Signal by Education

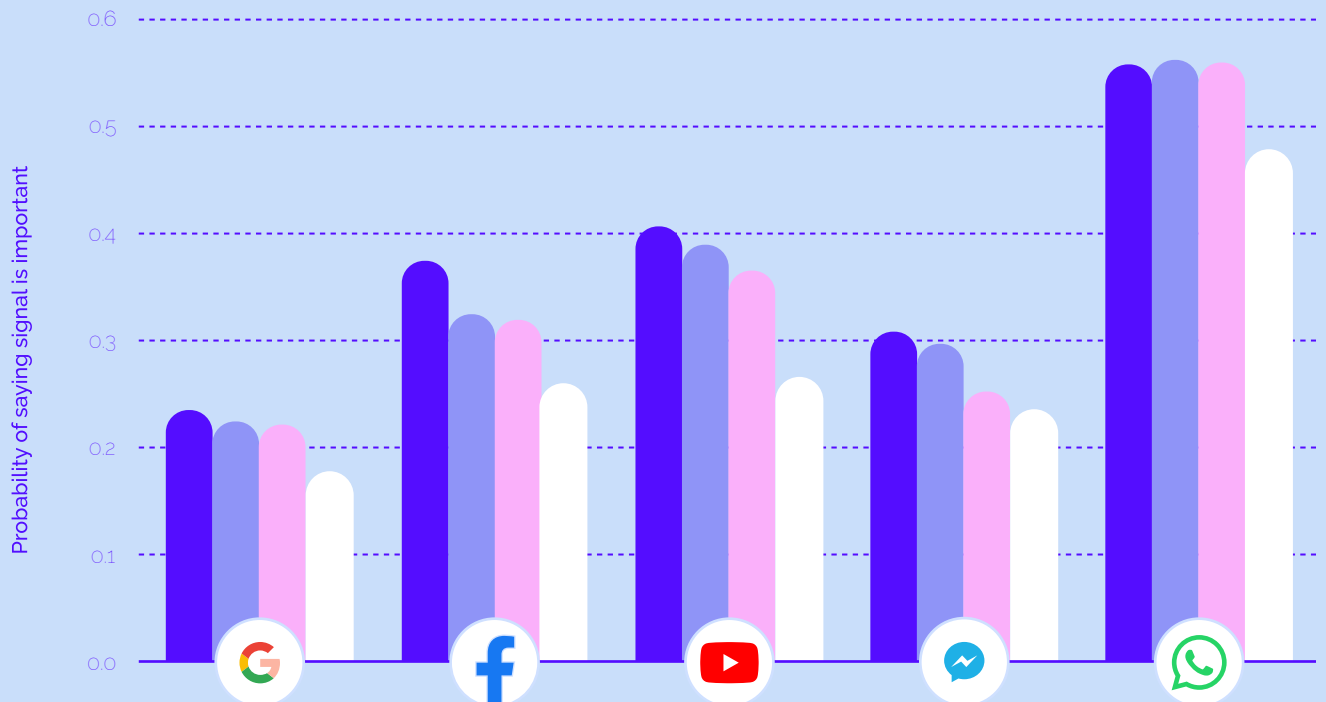
For three platforms – Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp – there were differences across education levels in how superusers viewed the importance of providing opportunities for groups to interact. For each platform, we see lower levels of education corresponding with lower likelihood of saying this signal was important, and those with higher education levels were more likely to think the signal was important for these platforms.



Importance of the Signal by Ideology³

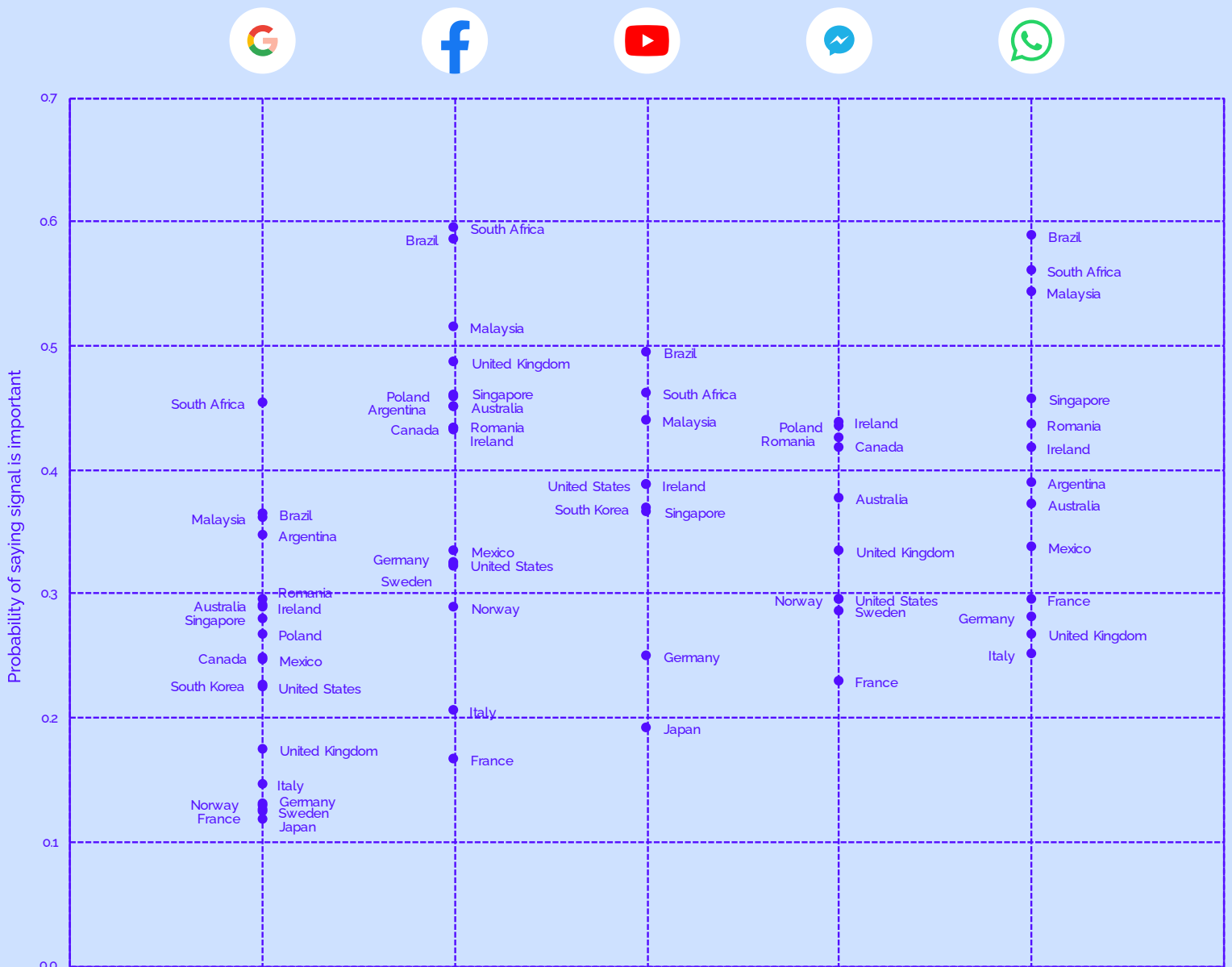
There were differences across political ideology in those who say it is important to “provide opportunities for different groups to interact,” for all five platforms. For Google, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp, those who did not know their ideology were less likely to say that the signal was important compared to those identifying an ideology. For Facebook, those on the left were also more likely than those on the right or with middle ideologies to say that the signal was important. And for Facebook Messenger, those on the left and with middle ideologies were more likely to say that the signal is important compared to those on the right and those who weren't sure of 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 people thought it was to “provide opportunities for different groups to interact.” The chart below shows the probability of saying that the signal is important by platform and by country. Overall, survey respondents in South Africa, Brazil, and Malaysia were the most likely to say this signal was important. France, Italy, Japan, and Germany were the least likely to say this was important.



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 nearly all instances, people rated the platforms as performing better than a neutral score of 1.0 with respect to this signal, although there is room for improvement. Facebook consistently earned the highest scores.

Performance index: Bridge connections between groups

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

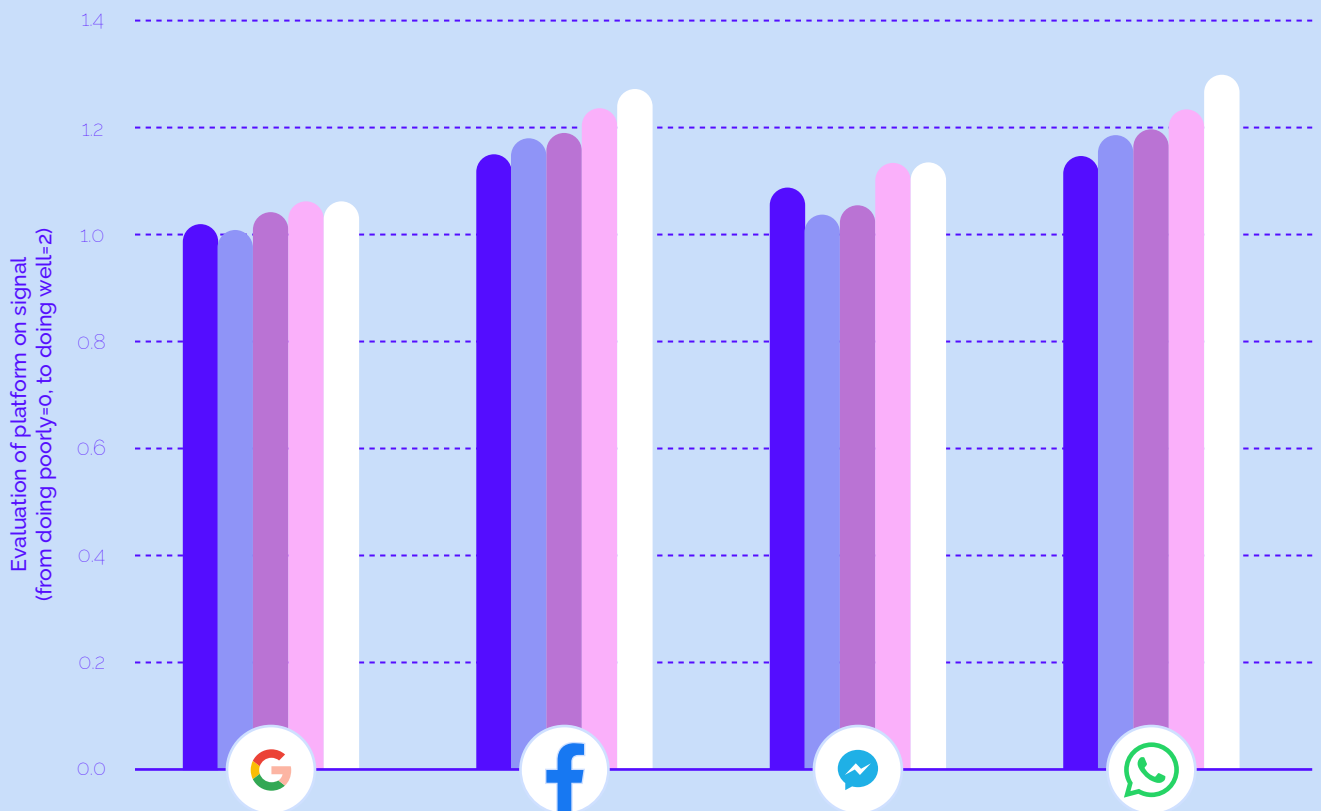


Data from the Center for Media Engagement. Weighted data. Asked of those who indicated that a given social media, messaging or search platform was their most used. Question wording - Which of the following do you think [INSERT SOCIAL, MESSAGING OR SEARCH PLATFORM] does well at? Please select all that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

Platform Performance on the Signal by Age⁴

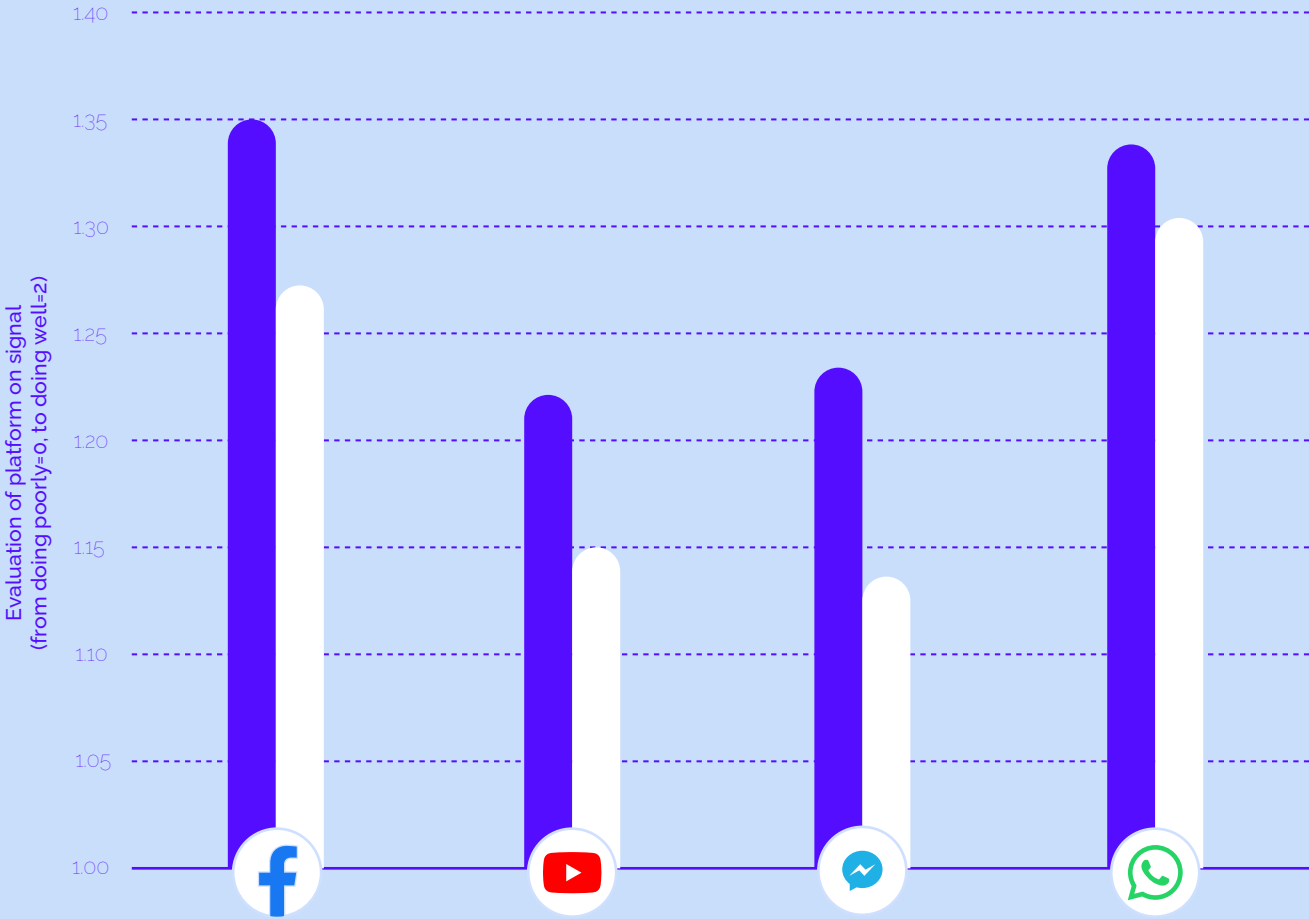
For Google, Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, superusers varied in their rating of the platform's performance by age. In all instances, those who were older rated the platform as performing better than did those who were younger. For Google, those aged 45+ rated the platform as performing better than those 18-34 years old. For Facebook Messenger, those 25-44 rated the platform as performing better than those 45+.

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).



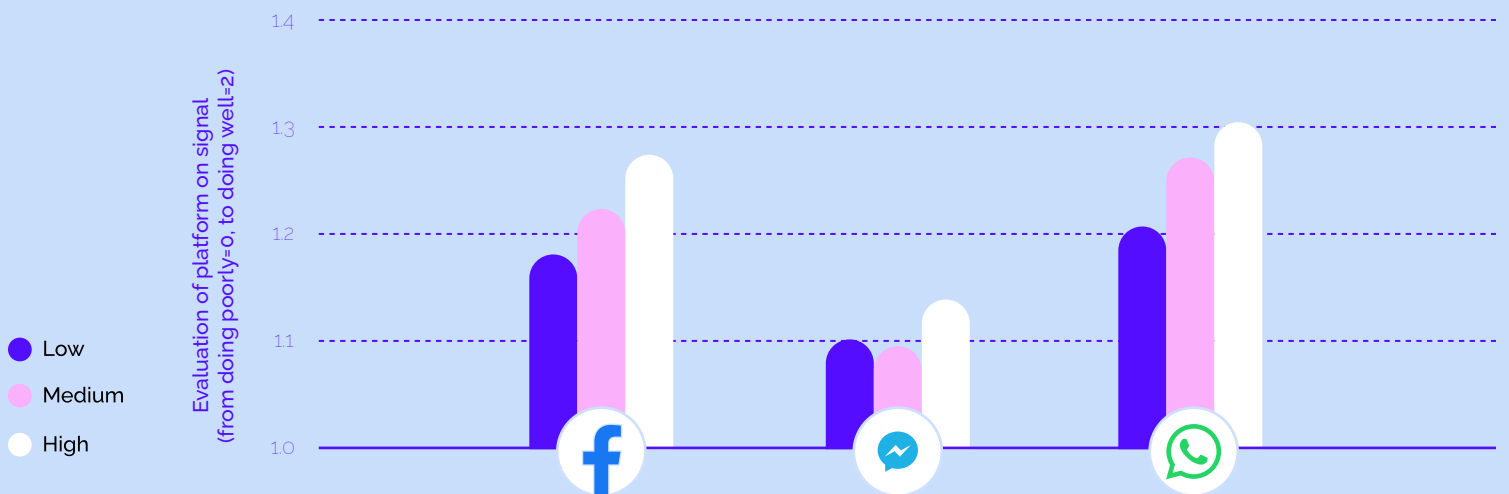
Platform Performance on the Signal by Gender

For Facebook, YouTube, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, women rated the platforms' performance on "provide opportunities for different groups to interact" better than did men.



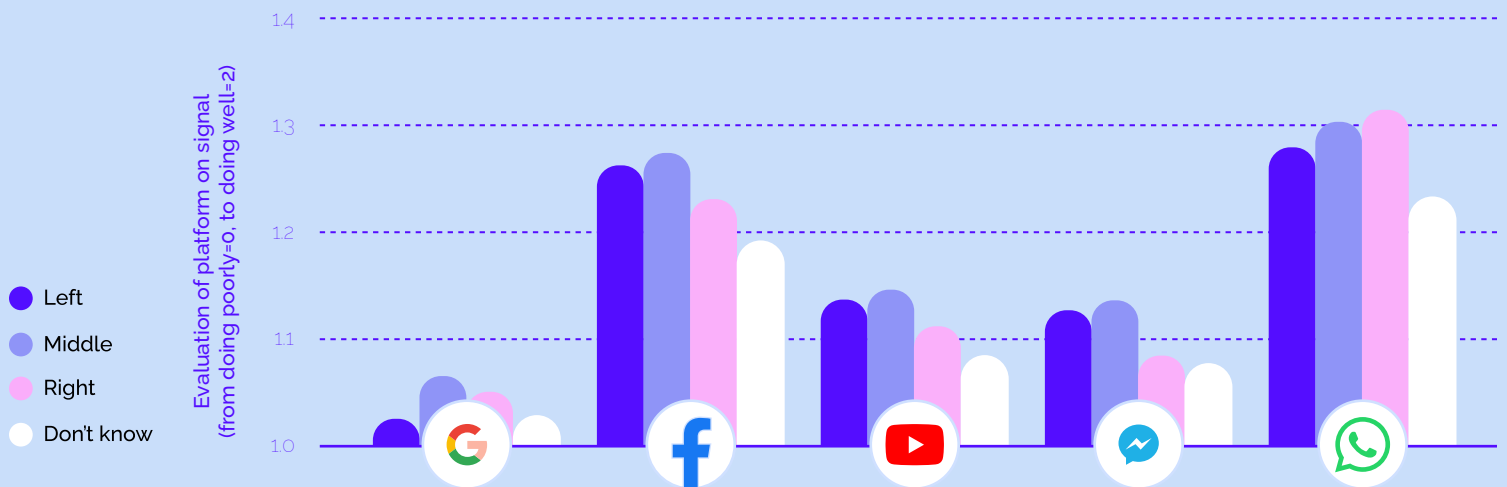
Platform Performance on the Signal by Education

For Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, responses differed by education levels. In each of those cases, superusers with higher education levels rated the signal performance higher than those with lower education levels.



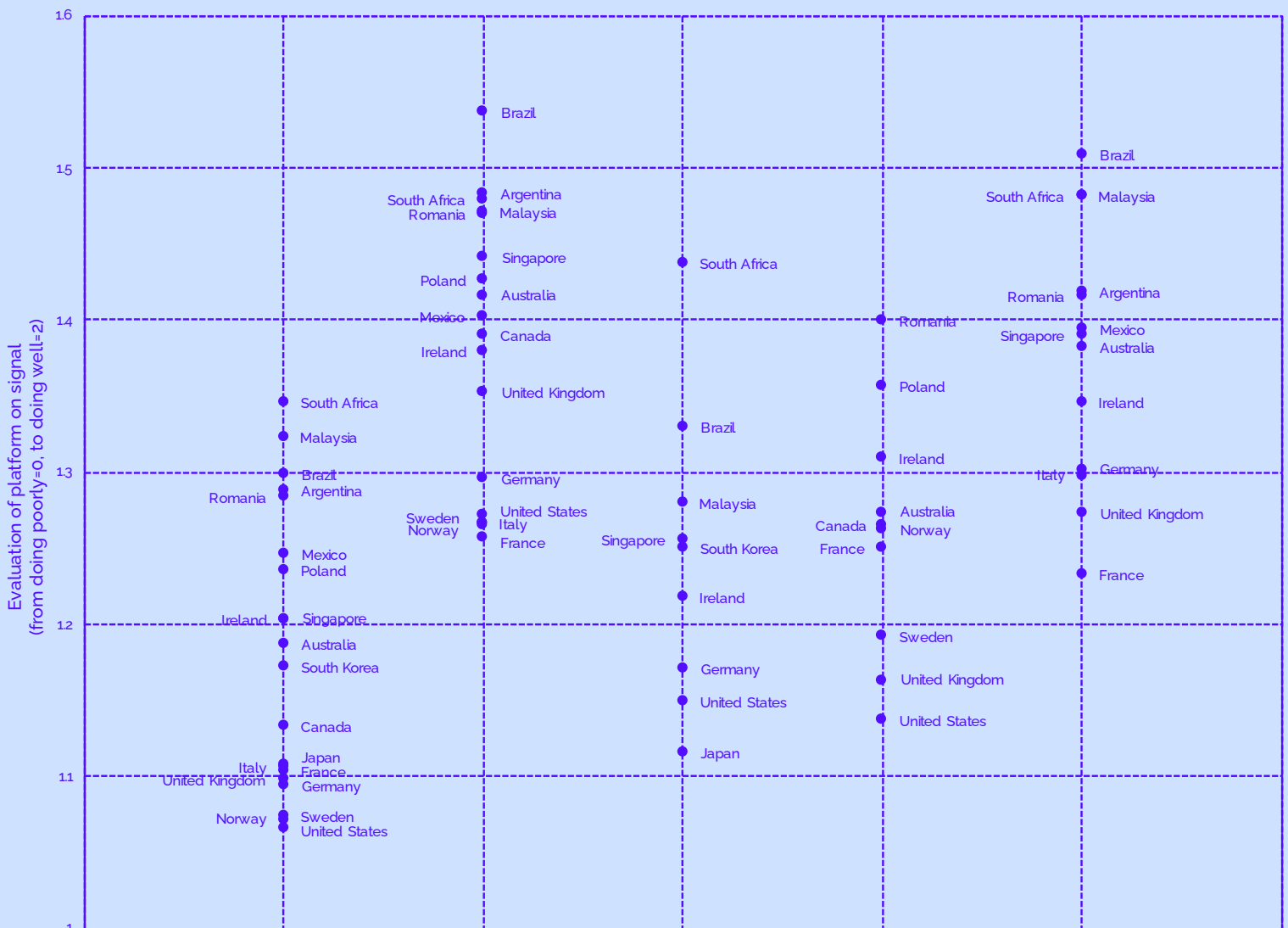
Platform Performance on the Signal by Ideology

There were differences across all five platforms in how those with various ideologies evaluated the platform's performance with respect to building bridges. For Google, those with middle ideologies rated the platform as performing better than did those in the middle or on the left. For Facebook, those in the middle rated the platform as performing better than those on the right, and those who didn't know their ideology rated the platform as performing worse than did others. For YouTube, those with middle ideologies rated the platform as performing better than did those who didn't know their ideology. For Facebook Messenger, those with middle ideologies rated the platform as performing better than did those on the right or who did not know their ideology. Finally, for WhatsApp, those with middle ideologies and on the right rated the platform as performing better than those who did not know their ideology.

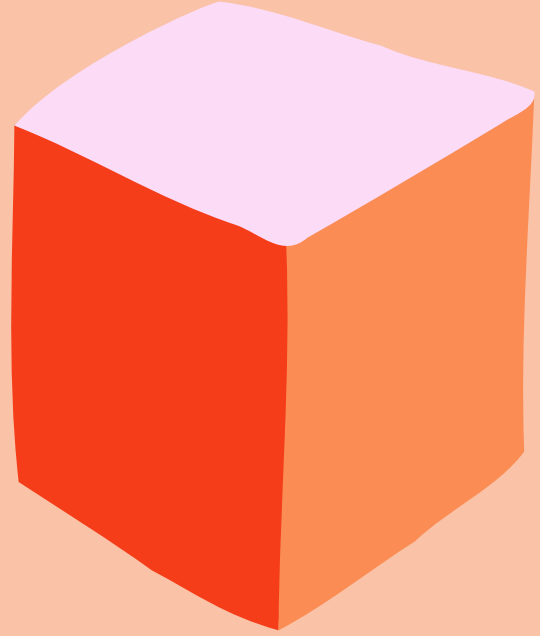


Platform Performance on the Signal by Country

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



Focus group report



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

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

The idea of social media creating connections between groups resonated strongly with participants – many of whom felt that connecting with other people is the primary reason they use and love social media.

Creating connections “is actually the main purpose [of social media],” explained Sophie, of Germany. “People who have the same

interest or search for something, etc., can connect on this platform. And it does not matter whether they share videos with cats or if they are sports-people or whatever.



I think it's going to be up to the people that create a dialogue between one group and another group. I think the means should be there, but, ultimately, it's up to the people that use it. ”
– Tracy, U.S. focus group participant



For business, it is a very good point... I don't know each other in the group. Say, the group is about 300 people. I introduce myself and try to make friends with them. Break the conversation barrier. In the end, maybe I get new friends, maybe make new business." – Jian Hong, Malaysian focus group participant

... There is a group or a community for each and every one."

Karla, of Germany, went so far as to note that connections between groups are the "central function" of social media. "This is the intention of social media. Different interest groups can group together and network," she said.

For the participants, connections between groups online offer many benefits, such as helping people reach others who are like them or network professionally. "I think specifically the people that may grow up in specific communities or certain parts of the world may not see that many other people that either look like them or act like them," said Brad, of the U.S. "...Through social media, they are able to see there are others out there that are similar to them or ways to help them – make them feel better." Jian Hong, of Malaysia, said social media helps him connect with others for business. "For business, it is a very good point," he said. "...I don't know each other in the group. Say, the group is about 300 people. I introduce myself and try to make friends with them. Break the conversation barrier. In the end, maybe I get new friends, maybe make new business."

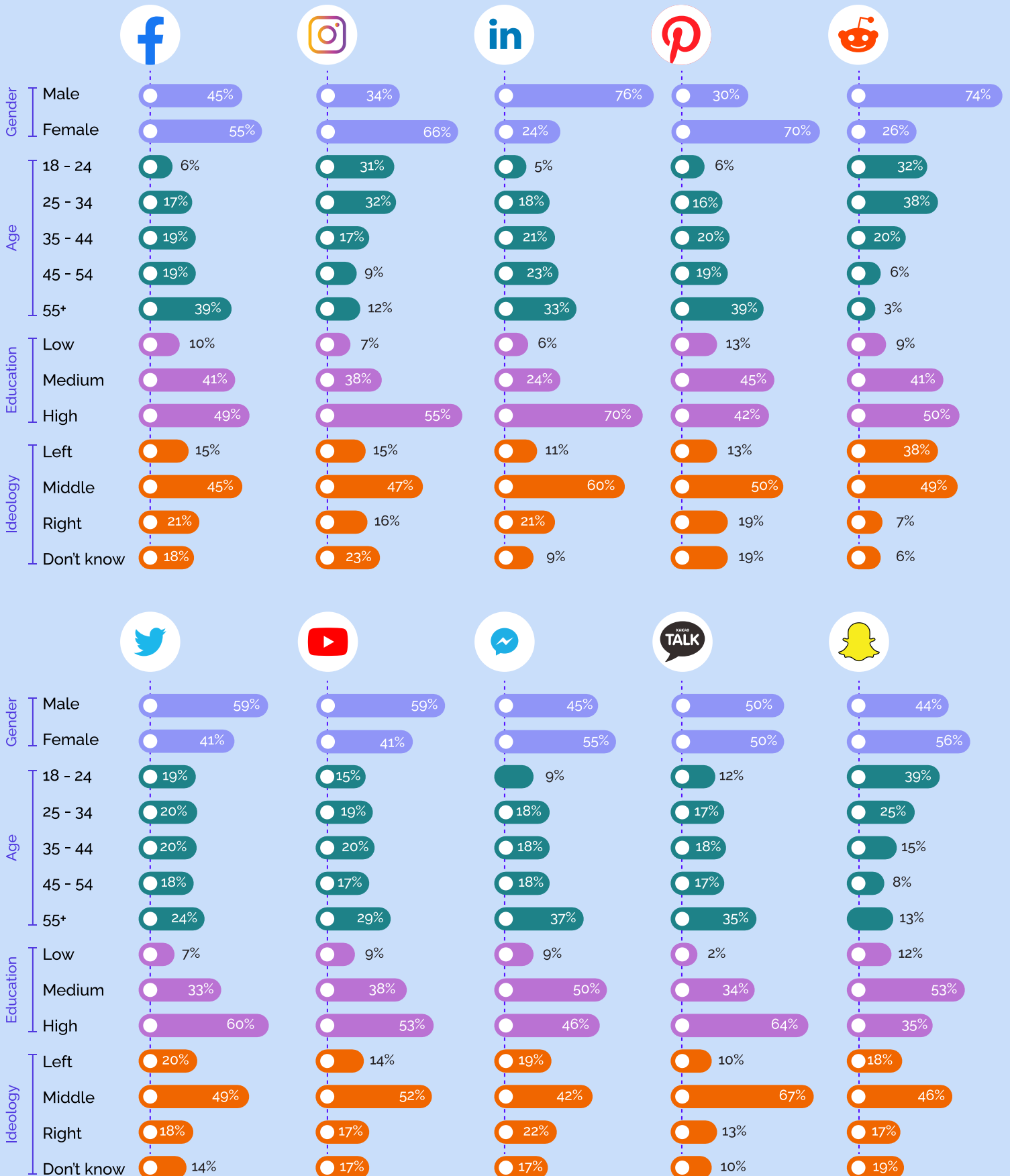
Several participants, however, worried that this civic signal was suggesting that social media should push for connections between people, and they did not see that as the role of platforms. "I think it's going to be up to the people that create a dialogue between one group and another group," explained Tracy, of the U.S. "I think the means should be there, but, ultimately, it's up to the people that use it."

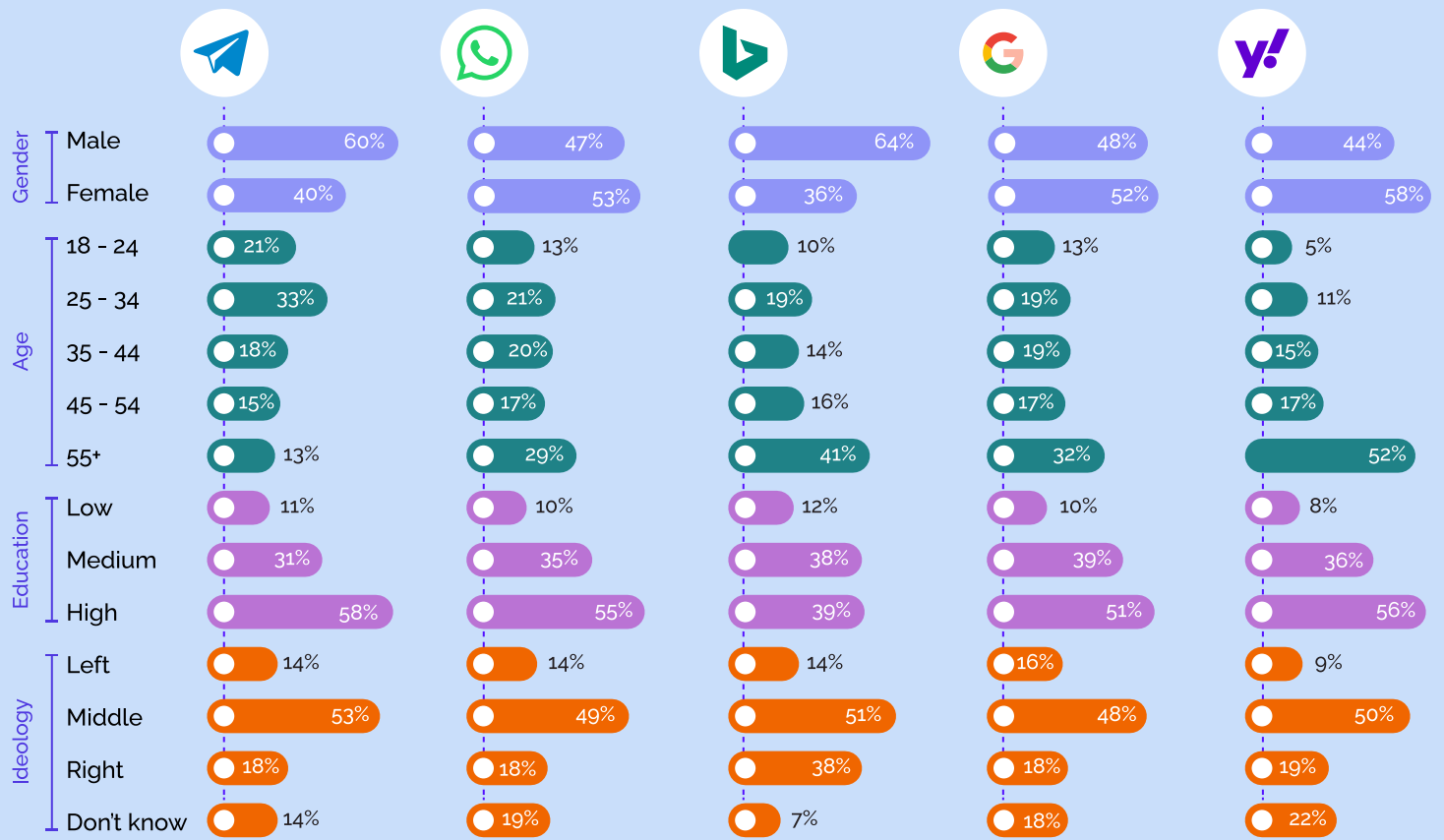
Most participants felt it was valuable when social platforms recommend groups for users. That didn't seem like it was stepping over the line for them. As Phumzile, of South Africa, noted: "When you say connections, is it in the sense that they suggest here is a group you may be interested in, so take it or leave it, it is up to you. We are not forcing you; we're just looking at your trends and things that you like, and we're suggesting."

Alexander, of Germany, explained that social media only suggests "pages or groups that match your own interest[s]." For him, these recommendations are helpful. "...If you have liked certain pages with cat videos, for example, you get suggestions to visit other pages, where there are also cat videos. So, it works in this respect," he said.

User demographics from survey

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





Logo glossary

Social media



Facebook



Instagram



LinkedIn



Pinterest



Reddit



Twitter



YouTube

Messaging



Facebook Messenger



KakaoTalk



Snapchat



Telegram



WhatsApp

Search engines



Bing



Google



Yahoo

