

# THE POWER OF VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

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# FACEBOOK GROUP AFRICAN MUMS IN DEUTSCHLAND

## HOW 4,100 MOTHERS BUILT AN ONLINE NICHE IN GERMANY



Photo courtesy of Maame Dentaa Amoo



Group by African Mummy in Deutschland

### African Mums in Deutschland

Private group · 4.6K members

About Discussion Join Group ...

**About This Group**

Welcome! This group is an all female support community. Especially created for Black women / women of African descent living in Germany. Africa... See More

**Private**  
Only members can see who's in the group and what they post.

**Visible**  
Anyone can find this group.

**Germany**

**Parenting Group**

**Group Apps**  
2 apps added by admins. See More

**History**  
Group created on August 15, 2018. Name last changed on May 13, 2020. See More

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/africanmumsindeutschland/>

# OUR RESEARCH GOAL

## ANSWERING FOUR KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT ONLINE GROUPS

With online groups growing in number and diversity, we wanted to understand group **membership, leadership, governance and behavior** in comparative perspective:

### MEMBERSHIP

What motivates people to participate in online groups?

### LEADERSHIP

What traits, skills and abilities are needed to run a successful online community that might have millions of members?

### GOVERNANCE

What rules bind these groups, and how are these rules devised and enforced?

### IMPACT

What are the outputs and outcomes of these groups' work on their members, and on society as a whole?

## OUR RESEARCH TEAM

BRINGING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE EXPERTISE TO THE STUDY OF FACEBOOK GROUPS

**Beth Simone Noveck**, Director, The GovLab, Professor, New York University  
Tandon School of Engineering

**James Button**, Senior Fellow, The GovLab

**Dane Gambrell**, Associate Fellow, The GovLab

**Eric Klinenberg,\*** Helen Gould Shepard Professor of Social Science and Director of the Institute for Public Knowledge, New York University

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**Anita McGahan,\*** University Professor, George E. Connell Chair in Organizations & Society, University of Toronto

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**Lakshminarayanan Subramanian**, Professor, NYU Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences

\* Project Adviser



institute for  
public knowledge



## OUR FOCUS

### STUDYING FACEBOOK GROUPS WITH GLOBAL REACH

The GovLab partnered with Facebook Community Partnerships Team to gain unique insight into online communities over six months:

- Partnership allowed greater level of access than scholars usually have to company research and a range of groups and their leaders.
- Work is part of Facebook's broader efforts to build understanding of community builders and their needs.
- Aligning company and research goals provoked important conversations about how academics and companies can collaborate.
- We focused intentionally on large, global and socially positive groups cognizant of the fact that there are also other kinds of groups operating online.

## **WHY FACEBOOK GROUPS: SIZE AND SCALE MAKE THEM AN IMPORTANT SOCIAL PHENOMENON**

- Over 1.8 billion people use Facebook Groups every month.
- Over half of all Facebook users globally are members of 5 or more active Facebook Groups.
- Facebook's 'pivot to groups' is changing the way users interact from 'one to many' to 'one to a smaller group, or several smaller groups', and this is happening around the world.

*Source: Facebook internal research, Aug. 2020*



African Mums in Deutschland	I Make This!	Syrian Youth Assembly	The Kindness Pandemic	Clube da Alice	Ask The Paediatricians	Wir sind Garten	Wanted Community
Confessions of a Married Woman	Home Remedies for Babies and Moms	French Startups Network	Mamis Are Us	Official Info Kota Palopo	PUBG Mobile Lite India	Watercolor Beginners & Enthusiasts	Subtle Asian Traits
Fertility Support Group Africa	Kanazawa   Girl Gone International	PULA Pune Ladies	<p><b>Our Work Included 50 Interviews with Leaders of Facebook Groups</b></p> <p><b>What skills and motivations do group leaders possess, and what are the challenges of leading a group on the Facebook platform?</b></p>				Run Eco Team
I Know A Guy	Caremongers India	Mettā Nairobi	Let's Cook Kenyan Meals	Female IN	Clean Cloth Nappies	Elevation Church	Tropical Fish Keeping UK
Tales of Nigerians	Essex Coronavirus Action	Let's Cook Kenyan Meals			Ladymultitask		Khadad Khau
Creative Nestlings	White People. DOING Something.	Food Tank	Comunidad LadiesBrunch	Blind PenPals	50inTech	Peri Kertas	Surviving Hijab
Cairo Runners	Upcycling - aus Alt mach Neu! Do it yourself!	Girl Gone International	The Delegate Wranglers	#ichbinhier	Canterbury Residents Group	MotherHope Indonesia	Egyptian Professionals Network

## OUR WORK INCLUDED **26 INTERVIEWS** WITH DIGITAL COMMUNITY EXPERTS

We asked why people study online communities, what questions they seek to answer and what distinguishes them from offline communities.

Social media in the 2000s [allowed far-right online groups] to create spaces in which they could not only find one another but attract other people as well.

“...You can create – with 250 people in [an online] class – what Durkheim called a powerful ‘collective effervescence.’ ...It takes craft, but you can enable people to feel the solidarity and experience the empowerment, which is so important to religious experience and to social movements alike.”

**Lawrence Rosenthal,**  
Chair, Berkeley Center for Right-Wing Studies

**Marshall Ganz**  
Professor, Harvard Kennedy School

# WHAT WE DID

## COMMUNITY INSIGHTS SURVEY

- Analyzed and reviewed YouGov Survey of 1000 respondents in each of 15 countries

## LITERATURE REVIEW

- Reviewed more than 150 academic articles, studies and books by leading scholars in the fields of social psychology, human-computer interaction, collective intelligence, business, and management.

## CASE STUDIES

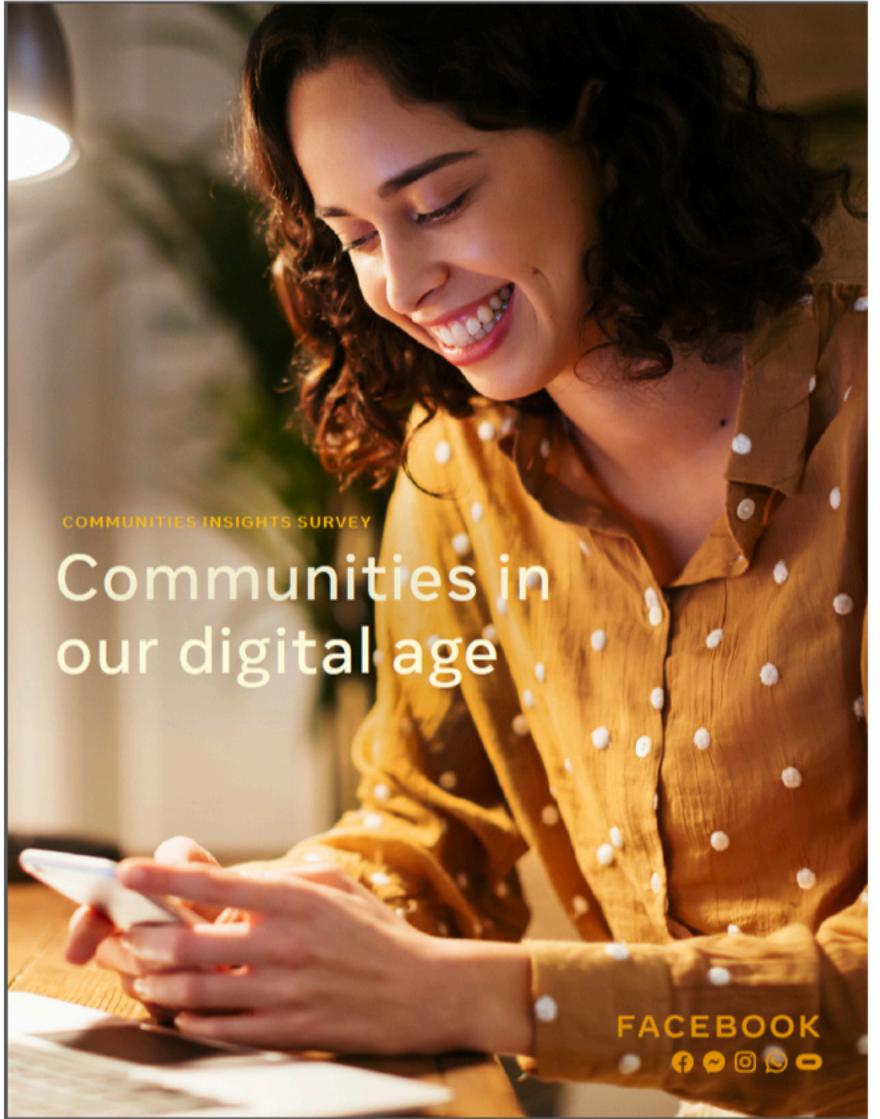
- 8 case studies about impactful group leaders around the world

## FACEBOOK RESEARCH

- Analyzed 29 Pieces of internal Facebook research on communities and their leaders

## REPORT

- Wrote extended narrative to understand how online groups operate, who creates and leads these groups, why people join them, what they do in them, what impact they are having, and whether they offer the same sense of trust, friendship and belonging as do physical communities.



<https://www.facebook.com/community/what's-new/facebook-communities-insights-survey/>

## KEY FINDINGS

### Online Groups Enable Meaningful Connections Across Borders -- But Local Still Matters

People can experience a strong sense of community despite the lack of physical proximity:

- ▶ For the largest number surveyed, **their “most important” group was primarily online.** 11 out of 15 countries; France and Germany exceptions.
- ▶ Few “online groups” are **wholly** online.
- ▶ **Small still matters.** Though some very large groups still generate close emotional connections, the median size of “most important” groups was 25 to 100; Morocco and Egypt exceptions.
- ▶ **Local still matters.** 38 percent of respondents named groups with ties to local communities as generating “quite a bit or great deal of belonging,”
- ▶ Geography, while out of sight, is never out of mind -- virtual space creates an opportunity for **non-dominant or “cross-cleavage” groups** to convene and govern themselves.

## KEY FINDINGS

### The Rise of the Online Leader

- ▶ In the eyes of members, the most successful leaders are **ethical, transparent and inclusive**. Consistent results across 15 countries.
- ▶ A key difference online: the ability to **see and measure member behaviors**, and use this data to improve engagement.
- ▶ **Strong, empathetic moderation** is a key success factor. The ability to moderate “little and often” may make this task easier.
- ▶ Most group members learn rules not from a formal rule-book but through **observations of conversation and enforcement**.
- ▶ A new profession is emerging: online group leaders who create safe, shared spaces. Yet for most, this is a unpaid labor of love, and **almost no academic certification is yet on offer**.

## **QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **THE MEMBERSHIP, LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND IMPACT OF ONLINE GROUPS IS A RIPE AREA FOR MORE WORK**

- How can online groups and their leaders be supported to ensure they provide maximum voice, participation and benefit to their members?
- How do skills and competencies, power, and other assets developed by leaders of online groups translate into groups and power structures in the real world?
- How can the governance of online groups, and in turn the experiences of members, be improved?

# THANK YOU

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