

# Promoting Online Civility Through Platform Architecture

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“ *This research demonstrates the importance of considering the design, structure, and affordance of the online environments when online platforms seek to promote civility and other prosocial behaviors.* ”

## \* THE QUESTION:

Can the design architecture of a social media platform encourage more civil conversations among users?

## \* THE STUDY:

In recent years significant attention has been paid to addressing and reducing unwanted content and behaviors on social platforms, from harassment to hate speech. However, a healthy community is not defined only by the absence of negative experience, but also the promotion of pro-social interactions. The goal of this study was to refocus on the potential of social media platforms to promote individual and community well-being.

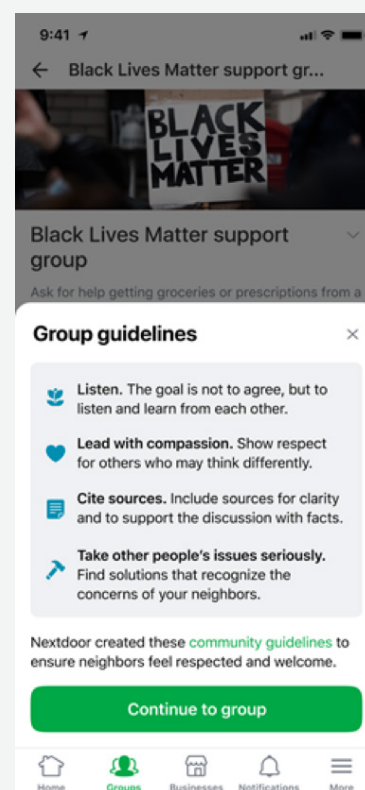
Conducted in collaboration with Nextdoor, a social platform for neighbors within a defined geographic area, the study involved:

1. Prompting authors of popular neighborhood posts to move these conversations from the neighborhood-wide feed to new groups dedicated to discussion of the topic; and
2. A randomized experiment providing members who join these newly formed groups a set of pro-social guidelines for group discussion.

For each of these, we used a mix of qualitative, quantitative, and user behaviors measures for analysis:

- The civility of comments using a novel civility labeling codebook developed for this study
- Moral values reflected in comments using the Moral Foundations Dictionary
- Members' reports of comments on the platform

nextdoor



## \* THE RESULTS:

In a large analysis of comments posted to Nextdoor, results indicate that platform architecture can be used to positively shape the civility of conversations.

Comments within newly formed groups were associated with being more civil and less frequently reported than the comments on the neighborhood-wide posts.

Comments in groups where new members were shown guidelines were less likely to be reported and were expressed in a more morally virtuous tone than comments in groups where new members were not shown guidelines.

[Read the full article in The Journal of Online Trust and Safety](#) ►