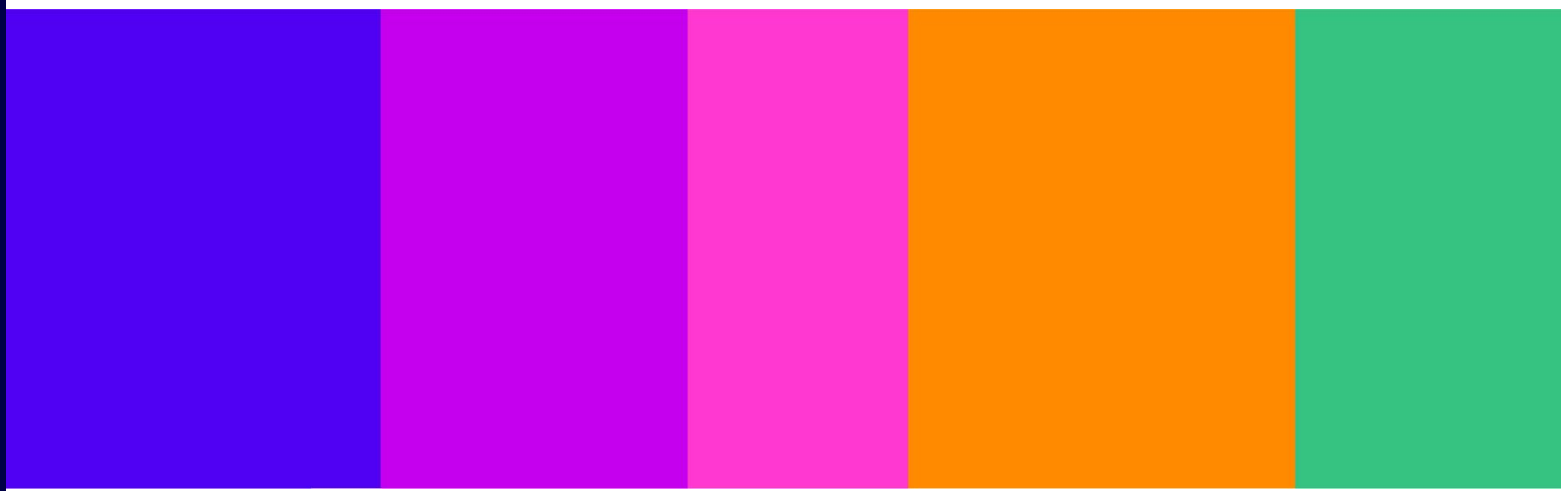


Understanding adults' experiences of using online communities

Technical Report

24th June 2026



Contents

Introduction

- Preface
- Research Objectives
- Summary of Approach
- Sample

Appendix A

- Sample frame for qualitative recruitment

Appendix B

- Stage 1 discussion guide (digital community)

Appendix C

- Stage 2 discussion guide (text-based focus groups)

Appendix D

- Quantitative questionnaire for the online survey

Introduction

Preface

Ofcom wanted to look at how online services can support flourishing in online communities through design, governance and community features, not just content moderation. We wanted to examine what people gain from online communities, where they encounter problems, and which service levers can help or harm positive participation and well-being.

Throughout the research, the phrase 'online community' was employed, meaning: *a group connected by a shared interest or purpose, interacting on a digital platform under shared rules/norms, at a meaningful scale (more than a handful of friends), including forums and local groups, and enabling interaction with people not known offline.*

Research Objectives

Through this research, we aimed to explore and understand:

What adults gain from online communities.

- To determine what users don't enjoy about their communities (content, behaviour, norms/governance), and how services can (i) foster healthy communities and (ii) disrupt pathways into harmful ones.
- To gather actionable recommendations for service design and governance

Note: The opinions expressed by participants are their own and do not represent Ofcom's views or positions.

Summary of approach

Quantitative approach:

YouGov conducted a 10-minute online survey of UK adults (18+) exploring how many people take part in online communities, the benefits and barriers they experience, and how different service features can affect use. The findings were also used to inform the qualitative phase.

The sample consisted of n=2,448 UK adults 18+, nationally representative by age, gender and nation/region who had ever used an online community; quotas for social grade and education. Our final sample was expanded to include 650 respondents who had never used an online community.

Fieldwork was delivered via our online panel/omnibus for efficient targeting and quick turnaround.

Qualitative approach:

YouGov Qualitative conducted a 2-stage research project with between 49-59 participants.

30 participants. Stage 1 was conducted between 2nd to 6th June, and Stage 2 took place between 24th to 26th June, with a 2-week break in between to allow time pause and reflect on the emerging findings.

Stage 1: A 2-day digital community, hosted on the Recollective platform, with 59 UK adults (18+), that also participated in the quantitative survey. All adults had used an online community in the last 12 months. Day 1 covered the different online communities they were members of and likes/dislikes. Day 2 covered the benefits and downsides of online communities and their attitudes towards rules and rule-breaking.

Stage 2: 6 x 90-minute text-based focus groups were carried out with 49 UK adults that also participated in the 2-day community. The focus groups explored what an 'ideal' online community looked like to them – including what tools, functions, rules and guidelines it would have and how it would respond to specific scenarios.

The analysis was undertaken by researchers who conducted the fieldwork in multiple analysis sessions. Data was analysed using thematic analysis and key recruitment criteria.

Sample

All participants were recruited from the YouGov panel.

The total sample of n = 3,098 respondents was weighted according to nationally representative fallout:

Sample		N (of 3,098 total)	% of sample
Gender	Male	1,503	49%
	Female	1,595	52%
Age	18-24	344	11%
	25-34	431	14%
	35-44	644	21%
	45-54	469	15%
	55+	1,210	39%
Income	Low (<£24,999)	716	23%
	Medium (£25,000-£49,000)	871	28%
	High (£50,000<)	967	31%
Region	North	737	23%
	Midlands	480	16%
	East/South	1,023	32%
	Wales	161	5%
	Scotland	250	8%
	London	267	13%
	Northern Ireland	55	3%

Qualitative participants were recruited directly from the quantitative survey.

The final sample frame for the digital community of 59 participants included:

- Broad representation across key demographic groups. We recruited a balanced mix of participants by gender and included individuals from all major socioeconomic grades (A, B, C1, C2, D and E) and UK nations.

¹ Please note that percentages may not add up to 100% for each category (e.g. gender) due to rounding and some respondents opting to select don't know or prefer not to say for these demographic questions.

- We also introduced minimum quotas across urban–rural location, ethnicity, sexuality and disability/long-term health conditions to ensure sufficient representation of these groups within the sample.
- Participants were intentionally drawn from different types of online communities - for example neighbourhood groups, hobby-based forums and fitness communities - and reflected a mix of use levels and types of experiences.

The 6 x text based groups were organised as follows:

Group 1: Users aged 18-34 - 9 participants

Group 2: Users aged 35+ - 8 participants

Group 3: Moderators of online communities - 7 participants

Group 4: Creators / frequent posters in online communities (*Those who post comments, join in with debates and/or post creative content at least once a week, excluding moderators*) - 10 participants

Group 5: Users that have experienced both the benefits and downsides of an online community - 7 participants

Group 6: Users that have had a negative experience within an online community, some of whom reported the issue - 8 participants

Appendix

Appendix A – Sample frame for qualitative recruitment

The following sample frame was designed for participants of the digital community. These same participants were then invited to participate in follow-up focus groups, organised as per the later table.

Sample frame – 2-day online community with 40 people
<p><i>Who to include in the online community.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Adults aged 18+, mix of ages</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Min. of 5 from each age band (e.g. 18-24)</i> • <i>Aim for 50/50 split of males/females</i> • <i>Aim for 50/50 split of socioeconomic grade (e.g. ABC1, C2DE)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Min of 5 x respondents from each individual grade (e.g. 5 x AB)</i> • <i>Participants will be based across the UK (mix)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Regional spread: Min. 20 x England, Min. 3 x Scotland, Min. 3 x Wales, Min 3 x Northern Ireland</i> ○ <i>Min 10 x rural</i> • <i>Aim for at least 8x respondents from BAME backgrounds</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Min. 3 x Black background</i> ○ <i>Min. 2 x Asian backgrounds</i> • <i>All to be current members of an online community</i> • <i>Capture a mix of levels of engagement (e.g. active user vs. passive user, moderator etc)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Min. 10 x moderators</i> ○ <i>Min. 10 x creators/frequent posters</i> ○ <i>Min. 10 x passive users</i> • <i>Capture a mix of different online community platforms used (Q4a)</i> • <i>Capture a mix of experiences in these communities (positive/negative features identified)</i> • <i>Capture a mix of different types of online communities used (e.g. advice, local community, hobbies, gaming) (Q3)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Min 6 x most used community is local neighbourhood</i> ○ <i>Min 2x for all other groups</i> • <i>Min. 3 LGBTQ+ respondents</i> • <i>Min. 3 disabled respondents</i> • <i>Scale of community and access</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Min. of 5 x local, Min. of 5 x national and Min. of 5 x international (Q6)</i> ○ <i>Spread of community size (Q7)</i> ○ <i>Min of 3 x belonging to paid memberships (Q10)</i>

Fieldwork (6 x text-based focus groups)				
Group	Date	Time	Audience	Notes
Group 1	Monday 19 th January	6:00-7:30pm (18:00-19:30)	Young people (18-34)	
Group 2	Monday 19 th January	7:30-9:00pm (19:30-21:00)	Older people (35+)	
Group 3	Tuesday 20 th January	6:00-7:30pm (18:00-19:30)	Moderators	
Group 4	Tuesday 20 th	7:30-9:00pm	Creators/Frequent	

	January	(19:30-21:00)	posters	
Group 5	Wednesday 21 st January	6:00-7:30pm (18:00-19:30)	'Control group'	Individuals who have experienced both positive (Q15) and negative aspects (Q16) of being part of an online community
Group 6	Wednesday 21 st January	7:30-9:00pm (19:30-21:00)	Negative experiences	Mix of people who have had a negative experience as well as people who have reported a negative experience (Q19/Q20)

For the moment, we are defining passive user/frequent creator based on their responses to their engagement (Q12):

Passive: Those who read conversations/threads and/or react to conversations/threads ONLY (ideally recruiting those who engage with communities regularly e.g. at least once a week)

Frequent posters: Those who post comments, join in with debates and/or post creative content at least once a week. This should exclude moderators.

Appendix B – Stage 1 discussion guide (digital community)

Ofcom – Flourishing in Online Communities
Online Community Discussion Guide
December 2025

SAMPLE SUMMARY:

RECRUITMENT SPECIFICATION

- *Adults aged 18+, mix of ages*
 - *Min. of 5 from each age band (e.g. 18-24)*
- *Aim for 50/50 split of males/females*
- *Aim for 50/50 split of socioeconomic grade (e.g. ABC1, C2DE)*
 - *Min of 5 x respondents from each individual grade (e.g. 5 x AB)*
- *Participants will be based across the UK (mix)*
 - *Regional spread: Min. 20 x England, Min. 3 x Scotland, Min. 3 x Wales, Min 3 x Northern Ireland*
 - *Min 10 x rural*
- *Aim for at least 8x respondents from BAME backgrounds*
 - *Min. 3 x Black background*
 - *Min. 2 x Asian backgrounds*
- **All to be current** members of an online community
- *Capture a mix of levels of engagement (e.g. active user vs. passive user, moderator etc)*
 - *Min. 10 x moderators*
 - *Min. 10 x creators/frequent posters*
 - *Min. 10 x passive users*
- *Capture a mix of different online community platforms used*
- *Capture a mix of experiences in these communities (positive/negative features identified)*
- *Capture a mix of different types of online communities used (e.g. advice, local community, hobbies, gaming)*
 - *Min 6 x most used community is local neighbourhood*
 - *Min 2x for all other groups except shopping/fashion*
- *Min. 3 LGBTQ+ respondents*
- *Min. 3 disabled respondents*
- *Scale of community and access*
 - *Min. of 5 x local, Min. of 5 x national and Min. of 5 x international*
 - *Spread of community size*
 - *Min of 3 x belonging to paid memberships*

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- Explore what adults gain from participation in online communities and the role persuasive design plays in shaping these experiences.
- Investigate pain points related to content, behaviours, governance, and persuasive design features that negatively impact engagement or well-being.
- Identify the features, tools, and functions that foster connection and sustained engagement without harm.

- Explore preferred rules, moderation approaches, and strategies for handling conflicts, harmful behaviour or extreme content.
- Assess how design mechanisms can support healthy communities and encourage positive engagement, whilst identifying ways to disrupt patterns that draw people into harmful spaces.
- Encourage participants to propose new features or redesign existing ones to enhance inclusivity, safety, and overall community experience.

Welcome page

[Welcome + instructions]

Hello and welcome to the online community! We are happy that you have joined us for first stage of this research project.

This project will be live from **9:00 AM on Thursday 15th January until midnight (11:59 PM) on Friday 16th January**, and you can access the website 24/7.

Over the course of the 2 days, **you'll need to log in each day to respond to a set of discussion**

questions that will take around **25 minutes** per day. You can complete them at any point during the day.

The focus of this stage of the project will be on your experiences of accessing online communities. By online communities, we mean:

Groups of people who have a shared interest or purpose, interacting on a digital platform. The members might know each other 'in real life' (and may meet up, for example to share a sport or hobby), or they might not. Online communities have shared 'rules' about how people in the group should behave - these might be formal or informal. Online communities may include forums, online discussion boards and/or community pages.

Each day's activities can be found **in the 'Activities' tab**. New activities will be published each day at 6:00 AM, and you will have time **before midnight** to complete them. **They must be completed in order, so you won't be able to move to the next day until you have completed the questions from the previous day.**

Keep an eye out for follow-up questions from the moderators, and please remember that the community is closed, so you and other participants will not be able to see each other's posts.

On the completion of the community, we will share anonymised transcripts with our client, Ofcom the UK communications regulator.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers. We are looking for you to be as open and honest as possible with your entries. The more you tell us, the more you will be helping us understand your experience.

You can contact us (the moderators) by clicking the inbox icon in the upper right-hand corner of this website, or email [moderators' work emails].

Do feel free to also reach out to us with any wider questions or for technical assistance.

We really look forward to speaking with you!

Day 1 activities

[Prompt: Welcome to the first day]

Hello and welcome! Today, we'd like to explore your thoughts and experiences with online communities. This will include getting to know you a little bit first, and then before asking you some questions around about what you have seen in online communities (e.g. specific features) and what you like or dislike!

Please keep an eye out for follow-up questions from the moderators.

Click "Continue" below when you're ready to get started!

[Text and image] 'Introduce yourself'

We'd love to get to know you a little better. Please write a short introduction about yourself, covering the following:

- Where you live (just the town or region - no exact address needed)!
- A bit about your life offline - hobbies, interests, or what you enjoy doing in your spare time and who with
- Your 'online life' - what devices you use most often, roughly how much time you spend online each day, and the platforms or apps you use the most (and why you like them)

[Image] 'Show us your online communities.'

As you know, you have been invited to this research as someone that uses an online community. We'd love to see the different online communities you're a part of. Please upload some images that you feel represent them. This can include:

- Screenshots of community pages or groups you visit
- Logos or icons of platforms you use
- Images that represent the topics or themes of your communities (e.g. fashion, gaming, local neighbourhood, hobbies, support groups)

Upload your collage or a set of images here. You can use any tool you like to put this together (e.g. PowerPoint or just save images into one file). If you prefer, you can upload several separate images instead of one collage. You can also use the stock images tool.

Please add a short caption for each image explaining what community it represents and why you enjoy it. Please be specific which platform and community it is from.

[Fill in the blanks – multiple] 'Tell us about your favourite online community'

Now we'd like you to focus on your favourite online community (the one you enjoy the most or use most often). Please fill in the template below, typing directly into the boxes.

Name of the community: _____

Platform it's on (e.g. Facebook, Reddit, Discord): _____

What is this community about? _____

What do you typically do there? _____
(e.g. just read posts, comment, share content, ask questions)

How often do you visit this community? _____

What made you join this community? _____

Why do you like it? _____

What do you dislike about it (if anything)? _____

Do you recall any rules or guidelines this community might have, that guide how people behave, post and engage with one another? _____

What makes this community different from others? _____

[Text and image] 'Show us your last visit'

We'd like you **to reflect on your most recent visit** to your favourite online community and share what happened step by step by typing in the box below

We'd like to understand the following from your response (if you can remember!):

- What made you open the community?
- What was the first thing you saw when you opened it?
- What did you click on next, and why?
- Did anything keep you there longer than planned? If so, what?
- Was there anything that made you want to leave?
- What do you think affects the tone/vibe of the posts you see?
- Is there anything that keeps you coming back to this online community?

Please include screenshots where possible to make it visual, this could be things like screenshots that caught your attention, posts that you clicked on or shared, and the homepage.

[Text] 'What features can you recall'

Please describe which platform features you use, or are aware of, on the online community/communities you use and what you think of them.

[Image review] 'Have you seen these features?'

We'd like to understand what features you have seen across the online community/communities that you use. Looking at the image below, please use the tools to mark what features you have noticed.

When you mark each feature, you will have the option to add a comment. It would be great if, when you mark something as 'seen', you could share:

- Your thoughts e.g. likes vs dislike about the feature
- If it is something that keeps you coming back to the online community/app, why is this?
- The positive or negative experience it has on your experience

Have you seen these features?

Gamification:

- Streaks
- Badges and achievements
- Leaderboards or rankings
- Countdowns or limited-time offers/events



Notifications:

- Pop-ups or nudges
- Personalised reminders (e.g. your friend just posted)
- Time-based prompts (e.g. you haven't posted in a while)



Personalisation:

- Content discovery and recommendation
- "For you" pages and feeds
- Suggested groups or communities



Safety and moderation:

- Reporting tools
- Blocking/muting options
- Community guidelines



Platform design:

- Likes, upvotes, reactions
- Follower counts / popularity metrics
- Auto play / infinite scroll
- Trending topics / hashtags
- Search and filter tools
- Accessibility features (incl. dark mode)



[Screen recording exercise] 'Explore your community in real time'

For this exercise, we'd like to see how you interact with an online community.

We're going to ask you to **record your screen** as you go through this website. As you record your screen, the platform can also record your audio, so we'd like you to think out loud and narrate your experience for every step of the way. Please note that this will not involve your webcam at all.

Start by opening up an online community of your choice (it doesn't have to be your favourite, but the one you have the most to say about) and then come back to this window and begin recording your screen.

We'd like you to navigate through the pages as you normally would if you were really visiting the community, to look at advice, support, entertaining content and so on.






When you are looking, please talk aloud, discussing the following:

- *Features that you **enjoy**/make your experience better/make you feel supported*
- *Anything about the design of the community that **annoys you**/makes your experience worse*
- *Anything about the design of the community that encourages you to **engage with specific content or sub-groups***
- *Anything about the design of the community that shapes the tone and/or members' expectations of the of the community **Features that make you want to post or create something***
- *Features that **encourage you to return regularly***

If you are struggling to identify features, please try and think about the features just shown in the previous task if you are stuck.

As a reminder, this covered:

Have you seen these features?

Gamification: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Streaks- Badges and achievements- Leaderboards or rankings- Countdowns or limited-time offers/events 	Notifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pop-ups or nudges- Personalised reminders (e.g. your friend just posted)- Time-based prompts (e.g. you haven't posted in a while) 
Personalisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Content discovery and recommendation- "For you" pages and feeds- Suggested groups or communities 	
Safety and moderation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reporting tools- Blocking/muting options- Community guidelines 	Platform design: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Likes, upvotes, reactions- Follower counts / popularity metrics- Auto play / infinite scroll- Trending topics / hashtags- Search and filter tools- Accessibility features (incl. dark mode) 

You can spend as long as you like doing this, but please try to do it all in one attempt—we really want to capture your first impressions here, so no redoing it once you're done!

For instructions and tips on how to use the screen recording tool, please see [here](#). Should you have any trouble accessing the site please don't hesitate to get in touch and we will be happy to help you out.

If you can't record your screen, or would prefer to keep the content private, then please select 'skip' and you will be taken to the text and image alternative.

[Fill the blanks] 'Explore your community in real time' – text alternative

We understand that not everybody wants to share the content on their screens or from their digital spaces.

Instead, please visit your online community and interact with it the way you normally would, for 5 minutes. Please use the template below to structure your response:

What features (if any) did you enjoy/make your experience better/make you feel supported? _____

What features (if any) annoy you/make you experience worse? _____

What features (if any) that encourage you to engage with specific content or sub-groups? _____

What features (if any) that shapes the tone and/or members' expectations of the community? _____

What features (if any) make you want to post or create something?

What features (if any) make you want to return regularly? _____

What annoyed you or felt pushy, if anything? _____

Day 2 activities

[Prompt: Welcome back]

Hello and welcome! Today is the final day of activities, and we'd like to dig deeper into your thoughts and experiences with online communities, with a focus on **features, rules, and guidelines**.

Please keep an eye out for follow-up questions from the moderators.

Click "Continue" below when you're ready to get started!

[Text] 'The ups and downs of online communities.'

We'd like you to reflect on what you gain from being part of online communities (over the last 12 months), and any downsides you've experienced. Please answer the questions below and share examples where you can.

- **Do you think you gain anything from being part of these communities?**
(This could be emotional, social, or practical benefits - anything from friendship and advice to learning and entertainment, or something else.)
 - **Please share an example of a positive experience, if you can remember one!**
- **Do you think there are any downsides to being part of these communities?**
(This could be about time spent on the platform, who you interact with, or anything else that feels negative.)
 - **Please share an example of a negative experience, if you can remember one and feel comfortable sharing.**

Note: feel free to write as much detail as you like – your examples help us understand what works well and what doesn't.

[Text] 'Leaving an online community.'

Do you have any experience of leaving / quitting an online community (or simply stopping using it). If so, we'd like to hear:

- What prompted you to leave or stop using it?
- Whether there was anything could have changed your experience, and prevented you from quitting?

As with the other questions, please only share the detail you're comfortable with. Please rest assured that this is an optional question and if you don't want to share, simply click next.

If this doesn't apply to you, and you haven't quit or stopped using an online community, feel free to click 'skip' and you will be taken to the next activity.

[Text] 'Recalling rules/guidelines in online communities.'

Can you recall any rules at all? [Yes no options]

What are they? [Open response]

Do you think they make a difference to how members engage or behave in the community? This can be either positive or negative. [Longer open response]

[Multimedia – Fill the blanks] 'Rule-breaking in online communities.'

Firstly, we would like to you to go one of your online communities and take a screenshot of the community and platform rules/guidelines.

And then answer the following questions:

- Which rules do you feel make a positive or negative impact?
- What happens when these rules are broken? Can you give an example?
- If you gave an example, how effective do you think this action/response was?
- Do most people follow these rules? Why or why don't you think is?

[Fill the blanks] 'Redesign one feature.'

For the last activity, we'd like you to think about any/all of the online communities you are part of. If you could remove or redesign one feature to improve the community's culture and feel, what would it be?

Please tell us why and what impact you think this change would have, filling the blank spaces below.

Type of community (e.g. gaming, hobby, advice): _____

Platform the community is on: _____

Feature you would remove or redesign: _____

Why you would remove or redesign this feature: _____

What specific impacts do you think this change would have on your experience: _____

What impact do you think this would have on the community overall: _____

[Prompt]

That's it for our questions for this phase of the study. Thank you so much for taking the time to take part and we look forward to discussing online communities further with you in the upcoming focus groups. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions about this research, please reach out to [research agency email address]

Appendix C – Stage 2 discussion guide (text-based focus groups)

Ofcom – Flourishing in Online Communities
Focus Group Discussion Guide
January 2026

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY:

FOCUS GROUP	DATE AND TIME	RECRUITMENT SPECIFICATION
G1: 18-34 year olds	<i>Monday 19th January, 18:00-19:30</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All aged 18+ - with a mix of ages across the age bands • Aim for 50/50 split of males and females • Aim for 50/50 split of socioeconomic grades • Regional spread across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland • Aim for at least 8 respondents from Black and Asian ethnic backgrounds • All to be online community users in the last 12 months, with a mix of levels of engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Min. 10 x moderators ○ Min. 10 x creators/frequent posters ○ Min. 10 x passive users ○ Capture a mix of different online community platforms used (Q4a) ○ Capture a mix of experiences in these communities (positive/negative)
G2: Those aged 35+	<i>Monday 19th January, 19:30-21:00</i>	
G3: Moderators	<i>Tuesday 20th January, 18:00-19:30</i>	
G4: Frequent posters/creators	<i>Tuesday 20th January, 19:30-21:00</i>	
G5: Control group – those who have experienced both the positives and negatives of an online community	<i>Wednesday 21st January, 18:00-19:00</i>	
G6: Those with negative experiences that have/have not reported behaviour	<i>Wednesday 21st January, 19:30-21:00</i>	

		<p>features identified)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capture a mix of different types of online communities used (e.g. advice, local community, hobbies, gaming) (Q3) ○ Min 6 x most used community is local neighbourhood ○ Min 2x for all other groups ○ Min. 3 LGBTQ+ respondents ○ Min. 3 disabled respondents ○ Scale of community and access ○ Min. of 5 x local, Min. of 5 x national and Min. of 5 x international (Q6) ○ Spread of community size (Q7) ○ Min of 3 x belonging to paid memberships (Q10)
--	--	---

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- Explore what adults gain from participation in online communities and the role persuasive design plays in shaping these experiences.
- Investigate pain points related to content, behaviours, governance, and persuasive design features that negatively impact engagement or well-being.
- Identify the features, tools, and functions that foster connection and sustained engagement without harm.
- Explore preferred rules, moderation approaches, and strategies for handling conflicts, harmful behaviour or extreme content.

- Assess how design mechanisms can support healthy communities and encourage positive engagement, whilst identifying ways to disrupt patterns that draw people into harmful spaces.
- Encourage participants to propose new features or redesign existing ones to enhance inclusivity, safety, and overall community experience.

DISCUSSION GUIDE IN SUMMARY:

Section	Topic area	Objective	Time
1	Introduction	Establish ground rules for the conversation and frame the context of the discussion	5 minutes
2	Warm up	Explore what online communities participants are a part of, and what they like / dislike about specific platforms.	15 minutes
3	Exploration of the 'ideal' online community	Explore what an ideal online community would look like for them – starting with what they would prioritise, what kinds of tools or functions it would have, how members would react with each other, what rules or guidelines it would have, things they would definitely include vs. not.	30 minutes
4	Scenario testing	Cover key scenarios and how the 'ideal' online community would deal with them.	30 minutes
5	Reflections	Cover most important features for an online community, and priorities when it comes to online community design and aims.	5 minutes
6	Summary wrap up	Final wrap up, advice, opportunity for observer questions.	5 minutes

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

Introduction (5 mins)

Hello and thank you for logging in this evening. My name is [moderator name] – I will be moderating the session for the next 90 minutes.

You have all been brought together this evening to talk about online communities. This includes ones you may have used and considered, what you liked about them, what you didn't like, and what you would prioritise if you could design one. It is an informal session - I am here to hear your thoughts and opinions, so please be as open as possible.

The discussion tonight is on a secure website. The client – Ofcom, the UK communications regulator – is observing the session as they are keen to hear from you firsthand. They will be able to see what you write, as you write it – but don't feel restricted by this – they really do want to hear what you think!

On conclusion of the research, we will share anonymised transcripts with the client and will be writing a report using anonymised quotations from this group. At no point will we share your contact information with them, or any third party, unless you have provided consent for us to do so. YouGov strictly follow the MRS Code of Conduct and the relevant data protection regulations, including GDPR.

To start with, could you all briefly introduce yourselves – telling me a bit about you, such as your age, region, who you live with, and what keeps you busy – whether that's work or hobbies.

I'll go first...

Warm up (15 minutes)

Moderator: Great to meet you all! You should all be familiar now with what an online community is, from your own experiences and also from the 2-day online exercises that we ran with you. However, I'm going to show you a definition, just to make sure that we're all on the same page for this session.

MODERATOR TO SHOW ON WHITEBOARD:

By "online communities" we mean groups of people who have a shared interest or purpose, interacting on a digital platform. The members might know each other 'in real life' (and may meet up, for example to share a sport or hobby), or they might not. Online communities have shared 'rules' about how people in the group should behave - these might be formal or informal. Online communities may include forums, online discussion boards and/or community pages.

Moderator: Now that you've all read that, I'd love to hear what online community/communities you're a part of right now. This could include gaming communities, local neighbourhood groups, advice and support communities and much more – whatever it is, I'd love to hear about it!

- What initially prompted you to join these communities?
 - **Probe:** family/friend recommendation, looking for information, solving a particular issue, looking for friends/connection
 - **If not covered:** What were you hoping to get out of your experience? Were you surprised by anything in your experience?
- Thinking about the platform(s) you use for online communities, what do you enjoy most about them? Feel free to name the platform, if you're comfortable.
 - **Probe:** features, ease of use, sense of connection, content quality
- What frustrates you or puts you off about these online communities/platforms?
 - **Probe:** confusing design, too many ads, lack of moderation, negative behaviour
- Do you prefer some platforms online communities over others? Why?

- Do you spend more time on some platforms compared to others?
- Why do you think this is?

Exploration of the ideal online community (30 minutes)

Moderator: *I'd like to get you all to consider now what your ideal online community might look like. To do this, you might want you to think about an existing online community you are a part of and what improvements (e.g. to the design, the features, the membership rules) could be made. However, do try and think outside of the box – and not within the boundaries of what specific platforms already have or allow for online communities.*

MODERATOR NOTE: emphasise for this section to ensure people provide ideas that they think people would enjoy / interact positively with. Challenge responses of people talking solely about things they believe would just maximise attention and engagement.

- *So firstly let's brainstorm! What different features would you want to include in your own ideal online community?*
 - **Probe:** Features that they would like to see more of in the online communities they are part of; rules or guidelines they would like to implement

Moderator: *What we are now going to do is use some polls and ideas on the whiteboard to help us build this together. On the whiteboard, you'll see a set of 'building blocks.' Each block represents something that could be part of an online community. Please have a read through (letting me know when you've finished) and then we will look to rank them.*

MODERATOR TO SHOW ON WHITEBOARD:

Safety and trust

- **Active moderation with clear consequences** (e.g. moderators remove harmful posts within a set amount of time and explain why)
- **Content filters and fact-checking tools** (e.g. ability to block extreme content, flag misinformation with sources)
- **Transparency about rules and decisions** (e.g. clear community guidelines, visible reports on moderation actions)

Privacy and control

- **Privacy settings you control** (e.g. ability to hide your profile from non-members, turn off data tracking)
- **Customisable feed and notifications** (e.g. you choose topics you see, turn off 'trending' or 'suggested' posts)
- **Control over design features** (e.g. opt in or out of reminders to check replies, , infinite scroll setting or follower counts)

User experience and accessibility

- **Step-by-step onboarding for new members** (e.g. welcome guide, intro posts, suggested groups for beginners)
- **Simple navigation and powerful search** (e.g. clear menus, keyword search that finds posts and members easily)

Community engagement

- **Engagement tools** (e.g. polls, Q&A sessions, badges for helpful contributions)
- **Spaces for connection and support** (e.g. dedicated 'introduce yourself' threads, subgroups for shared interests)

Moderator: Please rank these features according to what you think are the most important for an online community. 1 (being the most important)

MODERATOR TO RUN POLL

- In the chat, please explain what you chose as the most important to you, and why?
- I can see that [Moderator to type out the top 3 features] are the most important amongst this whole group, why do you think that is the case?
- Why do you think that [Moderator to type out bottom 3 features] are the least important?
 - **Probe participants' views on the bottom features:** *whether the features are less interesting, engaging, more harmful etc*
- Now thinking specifically about other tools and functions (that perhaps haven't already been mentioned) – what would your ideal community have, to make it easy and enjoyable to use?
 - **Probe:** *messaging or chat features, polls or voting tools, content filters or tagging, onboarding guides for new members, gamification (e.g. badges, points etc)*
- Thinking about the list, what else would you add to make your ideal community complete? Please write in the chat what ideas you have.
 - **Probe responses:** *why would this make a difference to your experience?*
- What would good interaction look like in your ideal community? For example, how would people behave towards each other, handle disagreements, and make new people feel welcome?
 - **Probe:** *what specific features or tools they would use to ensure this*
- (ONLY ASK IF TIME PERMITTING) How does visibility of numbers (likes, boosts, member status) change what people say and how others respond?

Moderator: Let's talk about design features built into platforms that influence behaviour. These features can support or undermine community health. Please look at the following:

MODERATOR TO SHOW EXAMPLES/DEFINITION ON WHITEBOARD:

- Push notifications
- Suggested/recommended posts and trending topics
- Follower counts
- Like counts
- Friend suggestions/connections
- Infinite scroll on a timeline
- Autoplay (for video content)
- Gamification (points and badges)

[Moderator to check that everyone understands what these features are]

Moderator: We're interested in how these features influence positive behaviour and engagement in an online community, (rather than time spent/things that

make people spend a longer amount of time on the online community). Please keep this in mind as you answer the next couple of questions.

- Using the tick tool located on the right-hand side of the screen, please tick which ones you think would have a positive impact in your online community –
 - Why did you select those?
- Now, using the cross tool located on the right-hand side of the screen, please cross which ones you would avoid or remove from your ideal online community.
 - Why did you select those?
- Are there any existing online community platforms you'd draw inspiration from in terms of their design features?
 - What do they do well that you'd want to include?

Scenario testing (30 minutes)

Moderator: Building on what we've discussed already, I'm now going to show you four different scenarios – one at a time – and I'd like you to think about how the 'ideal' online community would deal with them/share how they should be dealt with.

MODERATOR TO SHOW ON WHITEBOARD:

Recent feedback on your community suggests that some members are feeling a bit lost. How can you make sure that users have a positive experience, and join in if they want to?

- How do you think the ideal online community would tackle this?
- How would you design the online community so that newcomers feel welcome?
- What features/tools would you use to promote engagement in the online community?
- Do you see any additional challenges or things that could go wrong in this scenario?
 - What would you do to safeguard against this?

Moderator: I'm now going to show you another one...

MODERATOR TO SHOW ON WHITEBOARD:

Two members start a heated argument in the community which disrupts the community vibe.

- How do you think the ideal online community would tackle this?
- What rules or tools would you put in place to handle this?
- What would the consequences be for the offending members?
- Do you see any additional challenges or things that could go wrong in this scenario? (Probe only if needed: use of inappropriate language, spamming, discouraging new members etc)
 - What would you do to safeguard against this?

Moderator: I'm now going to show you the third scenario.

MODERATOR TO SHOW ON WHITEBOARD:

The community starts recommending content that becomes more extreme.

(Moderator to explore 'more extreme content' being recommended by both individual members and the algorithm/platform itself)

- What rules or design could you put in place to disrupt that, if anything?
- What features do you think contribute to this happening?
 - Would you get rid of those tools altogether? Why / why not?
- Do you see any additional challenges or things that could go wrong in this scenario?
- What would you do to safeguard against this?
 - (E.g. time outs)

Moderator: Thank you for sharing your thoughts so far - I'm now going to show you the last scenario.

MODERATOR TO SHOW ON WHITEBOARD:

A longstanding member of your community has posted a message that has been accused of spreading unverified information. What do you do?

- How do you think the ideal online community would tackle this?
- What rules or tools would you put in place to handle this?
- Do you see any additional challenges or things that could go wrong in this scenario?
 - What would you do to safeguard against this?

Reflections (5 minutes)

Moderator: Thanks for your contributions this evening, we're coming towards the end of the session now. I just have a few more questions to ask you to wrap up...

- Of the different features and tools we've talked about tonight, which one do you think is the most important for supporting a 'healthy' online community (i.e. a community which members want to be a part of and feel supported by)?
- What are three things that all online communities should strive for?
 - **Probe if needed:** *Safety, ease of access, protection of privacy*
- If you had to convince someone to join an online community who wasn't previously a member, what would you say to them?
 - **Probe:** *What would you warn them about/what advice would you give them?*

Wrap and close (5 minutes)

[Moderator to check if Ofcom have any final questions they would like the moderator to ask]

- Do you have anything else to share on the topics we have discussed tonight or any questions for our client?

Moderator: Thank you all for your time today, I really appreciate it. That is the end of this session. You should be receiving your voucher to the email address that your YouGov account is registered to within the next 1-2 weeks (please check you junk just in case). If for whatever reason you do not receive it after 2 weeks, please reach out to us so we can get it sorted for you. Have a lovely evening and rest of your week!

Thank and close.

Appendix D – Quantitative questionnaire for the online survey

Online Communities (Adults' 18+)

ASK ALL. SINGLE CODE. DO NOT SHOW 'NEXT' BUTTON FOR 15 SECONDS.

[INTRO] {Single} Throughout this survey, we will be asking you some questions about online communities. Please read the following definition and proceed once you have read and understood.

Definition of Online Communities: *This research is about online communities. By "online communities" we mean groups of people who have a shared interest or purpose, interacting on a digital platform. The members might know each other 'in real life' (and may meet up, for example to share a sport or hobby), or they might not. Online communities have shared 'rules' about how people in the group should behave - these might be formal or informal. Online communities may include forums, online discussion boards and/or community pages.*

<1> I confirm that I have read and understood the definition.

Required demographics (please add questions if not PDL)

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[gender_standardized]{single varlabel='Gender' required = HARD} Which of the following are you?

<1> Man

<2> Woman

Non-Binary

Prefer to use another term (please state – optional)

Prefer not to say

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. OPEN TEXT.

[age] {open-int varlabel="Age"} What is your age?

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[bixdemo_socialgrade] {single varlabel = 'Social Grade'} Social Grade

<1> ABC1

<2> C2DE

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[profile_ethnicity] {single columns=2 varlabel="Ethnicity" spd_category="race"} To which of these groups do you consider you belong?

<1> White British

- <2> Any other white background
- <3> White and Black Caribbean
- <4> White and Black African
- <5> White and Asian
- <6> Any other mixed background
- <7> Indian
- <8> Pakistani
- <9> Bangladeshi
- <10> Any other Asian background
- <11> Black Caribbean
- <12> Black African
- <13> Any other black background
- <14> Chinese
- <15> Other ethnic group
- <16> Prefer not to say

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[disability]{single varlabel = "Health/Disability issues (12 months)" spd_category="health"} Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

- <1> Yes, limited a lot
- <2> Yes, limited a little
- <3> No

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[pes_region] {single varlabel="PES Region"} PES Region #Updated 2017

- <0> Not in a PES Region
- <1> Eastern
- <2> East Midlands
- <3> North Scotland
- <4> London
- <5> Merseyside and North Wales
- <6> West Midlands
- <7> North East
- <8> North West
- <9> South East

- <10> Southern
- <11> South Scotland
- <12> South Wales
- <13> South West
- <14> Yorkshire

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[parent]{multiple varlabel="Parent/guardian - children younger or older than 18"} Are you a parent or guardian? Please select all that apply

- <1> Yes, of at least one child younger than 18 years old
- <2> Yes, of at least one child 18 years old or older
- <97 xor> No, I am neither a parent or guardian
- <98 xor> Don't know/Prefer not to say

PDL. ASK PARENTS (1 AT PDL_PARENT). ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[profile_household_children]{single varlabel="Household size - number of children"} How many of the people in your household are under 18?

- <1> 0
- <2> 1
- <3> 2
- <4> 3
- <5> 4
- <6> 5 or more
- <7 if 0> 6 or more
- <8> Don't know
- <9> Prefer not to say

PDL. ASK IF CHILD IN HOUSEHOLD (2-7 AT PDL_PROFILE_HOUSEHOLD_CHILDREN). ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. MULTI CODE.

[child_ages_mc]{multiple varlabel="Ages of children < 18 in household"} Ages of children < 18 in household

- <0> 0
- <1> 1
- <2> 2
- <3> 3
- <4> 4
- <5> 5

- <6> 6
- <7> 7
- <8> 8
- <9> 9
- <10> 10
- <11> 11
- <12> 12
- <13> 13
- <14> 14
- <15> 15
- <16> 16
- <17> 17
- <99> Not applicable - no children <18 in household

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[profile_household_adults] {single varlabel="Household size - number of adults"} How many members of your household are 18 or older?

- <0> 0
- <1> 1
- <2> 2
- <3> 3
- <4> 4
- <5> 5
- <6> 6
- <7> 7
- <8> 8 or more
- <98> Don't know

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[employment_status] {multiple max=2 varlabel="Employment status"} What is your current employment status? If you have a full time and a part time occupation, then please tick both that apply.

- <1> Working full time
- <2> Working part time
- <3> Studying/training full time
- <4> Studying/training part time
- <5 xor> Not working or studying/training

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[sexuality_2020] {single varlabel = 'Sexuality' spd_category="sex"} Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation

- <1> Heterosexual
- <2> Gay or lesbian
- <3> Bisexual
- <4> Queer
- <97> Other
- <99> Prefer not to say

PDL. ASK ALL. ASK IF NOT CODED IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. SINGLE CODE.

[ONS_urban] {single varlabel="Living in Urban / Rural / Town and Fringe"} Grouped Urban for England, Scotland & Wales

- <1> Urban
- <2> Town and Fringe
- <3> Rural
- <10> Uncoded

ASK ALL. SINGLE CODE.

[Q1] {single} Do you or have you ever used or visited an online community or communities?

As a reminder, by "online communities" we mean groups of people who have a shared interest or purpose, interacting on a digital platform.

The members might know each other 'in real life' (and may meet up, for example to share a sport or hobby), or they might not. Online communities have shared 'rules' about how people in the group should behave - these might be formal or informal. Online communities may include forums, online discussion boards and/or community pages.

This could include:

- *Forums, fan pages, gaming servers, social groups, and support networks*
- *Communities with external rules or norms (formal or informal)*
- *Platforms where interaction with people you don't know in real life is possible*
- *Groups larger than a small friend circle (minimum of 10 participants)*

1. Yes, I have used or visited at least one online community **in the last 12 months**
2. No, I have **never** used or visited an online community
3. I used to use or visit an/a number of online communities but have **not done so in the last 12 months**
4. I don't know

ASK ONLY THOSE WHO ANSWER “NO” OR “I USED TO” TO PREVIOUS QUESTION (Q1=2 or 3)

[Q2] {multiple order=randomize}

You said that you do not or no longer use or visit online communities, which of the following reasons describes why? Please select all that apply

Please select all that apply

1. I have never found a community relevant to my hobbies or interests [Only show if never used only community – Q1=2]
2. I prefer to connect with people offline
3. I find online communities to be distracting or a waste of my time / It didn't leave me enough time for my offline commitments
4. I don't feel safe or comfortable sharing online
5. I previously used online communities but stopped due to negative experiences [Only show if stopped using online community – Q1=3]
6. I'm not interested / I have never really thought about joining one
7. I grew out of that interest / community [Only show if stopped using online community – Q1=3]
8. I stopped using the platform the community was hosted on [Only show if stopped using online community – Q1=3]
9. I did not want to pay for access / it became too expensive
10. Other (please specify) {fixed}
11. Prefer not to say

For all who have used an online community in the last 12 months(Q1=1)

[Q3] {multiple order=randomize} Which of the following types of online community have you used or visited in the last 12 months?

1. Gaming communities *E.g. Twitch streaming groups, Discord servers, Steam community groups, Console specific communities (E.g., PlayStation Network)*
2. Health and wellbeing communities *E.g. Reddit health subreddits, NHS HealthUnlocked forum, Women's health groups etc.*
3. Sports and fitness communities *E.g. Football fan groups, gym/workout forums, MyFitnessPal forums, hiking/swimming/walking etc.*
4. Lifestyle, food, travel and hobbies communities *E.g. Travel blogs, photography forums, gardening groups, recipe sharing etc.*
5. Parenting communities *E.g. Mumsnet, Dadsnet etc.*
6. Professional industry / career communities *E.g. TechTalk UK, Doctors.net etc.*
7. Local neighbourhood groups *E.g. Nextdoor, local Facebook groups, community WhatsApp groups etc.*
8. Entertainment/fan communities *E.g. Online groups or fan communities focused on TV shows/films/music artists/Influencers etc.*
9. Creative communities *E.g. Art sharing platforms, writing groups, meme pages, video/short film editing forums etc.*
10. Fashion and beauty communities *E.g., makeup advice groups, skincare forums, fashion inspiration boards etc.*
11. Social or political discussion groups *E.g. Activism networks, current events forums, debate communities etc.*

12. Advice and support communities *E.g. Mental health support, relationship advice, school stress etc.*
13. Shopping or clothing brand communities *E.g. Nike, Costa Coffee etc.*
14. Communities for people with shared identities *E.g. Women's groups, LGBTQ+ groups etc.*
15. Other (please specify) {fixed}
97. None of these {fixed} [SCREEN OUT]
16. Prefer not to say

FOR ALL WHO HAVE USED AN ONLINE COMMUNITY IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS OR USED TO (Q1=1 or Q1=3)

[Q4a] {multicode, randomize order of platforms}

IF Q1=1: You said you had engaged with one or more online communities in the last 12 months. Looking at the platforms listed below, please indicate which, if any of the following, you have used to visit these communities in the last 12 months?

IF Q1=3: You said you had previously engaged with one or more online communities. Looking at the platforms listed below, please indicate which, if any of the following, you have used to visit these communities?

As a reminder, by online communities we mean online spaces or groups on which users may post, message or interact with other members and/or read their submissions.

1. Discord
2. Reddit
3. YouTube
4. TikTok
5. Instagram
6. Snapchat
7. WhatsApp
8. Facebook
9. Tumblr
10. Twitch
11. Steam
12. DeviantArt
13. Bluesky
15. Community's own platform (i.e. if it has its own website)
16. Work-related/professional network
17. LinkedIn
18. X/Twitter
19. Threads

20. Other [please specify] {fixed}

21. Prefer not to say {fixed}

For all who have used an online community in the last 12 months and those who have used online communities but not in the last 12 months(Q1=1 or 3)

[Q4b] For the following platforms, please select how many online communities you have engaged with on each one?

As a reminder, by online communities we mean online spaces or groups on which users may post, message or interact with other members and/or read their submissions.

[PLATFORMS – ROWS]

1. Show selected at Q4A

[NUMBER OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES ENGAGED WITH - COLUMNS]

1. 0 – I have not engaged with Online Communities on this platform
2. 1
3. 2-3
4. 4-5
5. 6+
6. Prefer not to say {fixed}

We are now going to ask you some questions about the online community you have used most often in the last 12 months, rather than your experience of online communities in general.

SHOW TO THOSE WHO USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS (Q1=1)

[Q5] {single order=randomize} Which category best fits the online community you have used most often in the last 12 months?

[SHOW CODES IF SELECTED AT Q3]

1. Gaming communities *E.g. Twitch streaming groups, Discord servers, Steam community groups, Console specific communities (E.g., Playstation Network)*
2. Health and wellbeing communities *E.g. Reddit health subreddits, NHS HealthUnlocked forum, Women's health groups etc.*
3. Sports and fitness communities *E.g. Football fan groups, gym/workout forums, MyFitnessPal forums, hiking/swimming/walking etc.*
4. Lifestyle, food, travel and hobbies communities *E.g. Travel blogs, photography forums, gardening groups etc.*
5. Parenting communities *E.g. Mumsnet, Dadsnet etc.*
6. Professional industry / career communities *E.g. TechTalk UK, Doctors.net etc.*

7. Local neighbourhood groups *E.g. Nextdoor, local Facebook groups, community WhatsApp groups etc.*
8. Entertainment/fan communities *E.g. Online groups or fan communities focused on TV shows/films/music artists/Influencers etc.*
9. Creative communities *E.g. Art sharing platforms, writing groups, meme pages, video/short film editing forums etc.*
10. Fashion and beauty communities *E.g., skincare forums, fashion inspiration boards etc.*
11. Social or political discussion groups *E.g. Activism networks, current events forums, debate communities etc.*
12. Advice and support communities *E.g. Mental health support, relationship advice, school stress etc.*
13. Shopping or clothing brand communities *E.g. Nike, Costa Coffee etc.*
14. Communities for people with shared identities *E.g. Women's groups, LGBTQ+ groups etc.*
15. Other (please specify) {fixed}

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1) IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

[Q6] {single} Again, thinking about the online community that you have used most often in the last 12 months, is the community...?

1. Local – most members live in a particular region of the UK
2. National – most members live across the UK
3. International – members live all over the world
4. Don't know {fixed}
5. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO CURRENTLY USE ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1)

[Q7] {single} And is the online community that you have used most often in the last 12 months ...?

1. Small – fewer than 100 members
2. Medium-sized – between 100 and 1000 members
3. Large – between 1000 and 10,000 members
4. Very large – between 10,000 and 100,000 members
5. Huge – over 100,000 members
6. Don't know {fixed}
7. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1) IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

[Q8] {single order=randomize} And from what you have seen, is the membership...?

1. A mix of genders
2. Majority men and boys
3. Majority women and girls

4. Majority non-binary or gender-non-conforming
5. Don't know {fixed}
6. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1) IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

[Q9] {single order=randomize} How did you first find out about this community?

1. From a friend / family member
2. From someone I know on social media
3. From an influencer or celebrity
4. At work, school, or university
5. From a TV show (including on Demand or streaming service)
6. From a radio show
7. From a podcast
8. From searching on social media
9. From a search engine *E.g. Google, Bing etc.*
10. Suggested by AI-generated response
13. From my social media feed
11. Other (please specify)
12. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1) IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

[Q10] {multiple order=randomize} Again, thinking about the online community that you have used most often in the last 12 months ... Which of these statements best describe how people join, view or contribute to content/discussions? Please select all that apply

1. It's accessible to everyone / the public
2. You need to be invited by another member
3. You request to join, and an admin/moderator approves your request
4. You pay to be a member
5. None of these {fixed}
6. I don't know {fixed xor}
7. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1) IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS AND THOSE WHO USED TO BUT NOT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

[Q11] {multiple order=randomize}

IF Q1=1 Why did you decide to join the community?

IF Q1=3 Thinking about the online community that you used to engage with the most, why did you decide to join this community?

Select all that apply.

1. I was curious and wanted to see what it was like
2. I wanted to engage with other people who like the same things as me, share my ideas, and/or share my identity
3. I wanted to share my own ideas, creations and/or opinions
4. I wanted to learn something new or get help with something
5. I wanted to pursue an interest in something
6. I wanted to get closer to a YouTuber, gamer, or influencer I follow
7. I had a specific question or problem I wanted help with
8. Other (please specify) {fixed}
9. Don't know {fixed xor}
10. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO CURRENTLY USE ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1)

[Q12] {grid, single answer per option, randomize order of options} How often do you engage with the community you have used most often in the last 12 months, in each of the following ways?

[OPTIONS - ROWS]

1. Post comments
2. Join in with debates
3. Post creative content such as videos and memes
4. Start new conversations or threads
5. Moderate content on the forum
6. Read conversations/threads/content made by others
7. React to conversations/threads/content without commenting (e.g. like, emoji react, up/downvote etc...)
8. Other (please specify)

[COLUMNS]

1. Multiple times a day
2. Once a day
3. Several times a week
4. About once a week
5. About once every 2–3 weeks
6. About once a month
7. Less than once a month
8. Never
9. Prefer not to say

BASE: Q12_8=1-7

[Q12_Other]

You mentioned that you engage with the community in question in another way. Please specify the method(s) that you engage with the community

Open end box

None (Fixed)

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1) IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

[Q13A] {grid row order=randomize} Still thinking about the community you have used most often in the past 12 months, how often do the following statements apply to your experience?

[ROWS]

1. I feel safe sharing my thoughts in this community
2. I feel like my opinions and views are respected in this community
3. I feel like I have people I can go to for support if I need it in this community
4. I feel like this community better understands me than people offline

[COLUMNS]

1. Always
2. Most of the time
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never
6. I don't know
7. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=3) BUT NOT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS

[Q13B] Thinking about the online community that you used to engage with the most, to what extent do you agree with the following statements...

[ROWS]

1. I felt safe sharing my thoughts
2. I felt like my opinions and views were respected
3. I felt like I had people I could go to for support if I needed it
4. I felt like these communities better understood me than people offline

[COLUMNS]

1. Always
2. Most of the time
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never
6. I don't know
7. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO EITHER THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS OR THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES BUT NOT IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS (Q1=1 OR 3)

[Q14] { multiple order=randomize }

IF QC=1: Still thinking about the online community that you have used most often in the last 12 month, have you experienced any of the following things?

IF QC=3: Still thinking about the online community that you used to engage with the most, have you ever experienced any of the following things?

Please select all that apply

1. I felt unsafe sharing my thoughts
2. I felt like my opinions and views were not respected
3. I did feel like no one in these communities supported me
4. I felt like these communities did not understand me as well as people offline
5. None of these [fixed]
6. I don't know [fixed]
7. Prefer not to say [fixed]

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVED USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN THE LAST 12 (Q1=1)

[Q15] {multiple order=randomize} Again, thinking about the online community that you use most often...

Has being part of this online community helped you with any of the following?

1. Expanding your social network
2. Connecting with people with a range of different views and perspectives
3. Developing new skills or knowledge
4. Sharing creative content
5. Networking opportunities / professional development
6. Improving mental health and wellbeing
7. Getting advice and support
8. Motivation to achieve my goals
9. Having a safe space to share my thoughts, views and/or ideas
10. Meeting people from other places and countries
11. A space that is separate from my 'real' life
12. Greater enjoyment of passions or interests
13. Helped me feel a part of something
14. Improved my confidence
15. Other (please specify) [fixed]
16. None of the above [fixed, exclusive]

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS(Q1=1)

[Q16] {multiple order=randomize} Still thinking about the online community that you use most often. Are there any downsides to being part of this online community? Please select all that apply.

1. A narrow range of perspectives

2. Poor behaviour of other members
3. Cost of membership
4. Fear of being judged by other members
5. Fear of being judged by those outside the community
6. Other members may not be truthful about who they are
7. Pressure to behave or respond in a certain way
8. Difficulty in understanding “in-jokes”, abbreviations or language
9. Too many notifications
10. Takes up too much time / Decreased participation in offline activities
11. Anxiety around continuing to check for activity/be active in community
12. Exposure to inappropriate language
13. Exposure to inappropriate content
14. Exposure to views I don’t agree with
15. Other (please state) {fixed}
16. None of the above {fixed xor}

SHOW TO THOSE WHO CURRENTLY USE ONLINE COMMUNITIES (Q1=1)

[Q17] {single} Again, thinking about the online community that you use most often. Does the community have rules or guidelines?

1. Yes
2. No – the community does not have any rules
3. Not aware of any rules {fixed}

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE ANSWERED YES TO Q17 (Q17=1)

[Q18] {grid, single answer per rule, randomize order of rules} What types of rules or guidelines have you seen on this community? Please select the most relevant option for each rule

[RULES - ROWS]

1. Content rules – Guidelines about what can or cannot be posted (e.g., no hate speech, spam, or off-topic posts).
2. Behavioural rules – Expectations around respectful interaction, tone, and language.
3. Posting frequency or format rules – Limits on how often or in what format users can post (e.g., tagging, use of images).
4. Moderation policies – Information about how moderators enforce rules or handle disputes.
5. Privacy and data rules – Guidelines on sharing personal information or respecting others’ privacy.
6. Membership rules – Requirements for joining, staying, or being removed from the community.
7. Commercial or promotional rules – Restrictions on advertising, selling, or self-promotion.
8. Event or activity rules – Rules specific to community events, challenges, or collaborations.

[COLUMNS]

1. This is a **formal** rule in the online community that all members are explicitly expected to follow
2. This is an **informal** rule in the online community, a norm, or way of acting that people tend to follow

3. This is not a rule or guideline in the online community
4. Don't know

Just before we end, a few questions about your experiences of online communities in general

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS OR HAVE EVER USED (Q1=1 or 3)

[Q19] {single}

IF Q1=1: Thinking about all of the online communities that you use and visit... Have you come across anything, in the last 12 months, on any online community that made you feel uncomfortable, upset or negative in any way?

IF Q1=3: Thinking about any of the online communities that you used to use and visit... Did you ever come across anything on any online community that made you feel uncomfortable, upset or negative in any way?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Prefer not to say

[Q20] {single}

IF Q1=1: Still thinking about all of the online communities that you use and visit, have you reported someone/something in the last 12 months?

IF Q1=3: Still thinking about any of the online communities that you used to use and visit. Did you ever report someone/something on these communities?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know / don't remember
4. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE REPORTED SOMEONE (Q20=1)

[Q21] {multiple order=randomize} Thinking about the last time you reported something/someone, what happened as a result?

Please select all that apply

1. The content or post was removed
2. A warning label was added to the content or post
3. The person I reported about was given a warning
4. The person I reported about was temporarily banned
5. The person I reported was permanently banned
6. Other community members called out the content/person I reported
7. I got a notification or other written update
8. I was asked to provide further information

9. Something else (please specify)
10. Nothing {fixed}
11. Don't know / Don't remember {fixed}
12. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE REPORTED SOMEONE (Q20=1) AND GOT A RESPONSE (Q21=1-9)

[Q22] {grid, single answer per result, keep order as Q21} You said the following happened as a result of the last time you reported something/someone on this community. How effective were each of the actions taken in stopping the behaviour/person you reported in the future?

[RESULTS – ROWS]

1. [PIPE IN ANSWERS 1-9 SELECTED AT Q21]

[COLUMNS]

1. Not at all effective
2. Slightly effective
3. Moderately effective
4. Very effective
5. Extremely effective
6. I don't know
7. Prefer not to say

SHOW TO THOSE WHO HAVE USED ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS OR HAVE EVER USED (Q1=1 or 3)

[Q23] {multiple order=randomize} Now thinking more widely about all of the online communities that you use and visit or used to use or visit. Which tools or options, if any, do you think would improve your experience of using online communities? Please select all that apply.

1. Tools to mute / block certain members
2. Better filters to manage what content I see
3. The ability to customise my feed or notifications
4. The option to use an unmoderated and/or neutral space (e.g. direct messaging, external platform without affiliated community moderators)
5. Stronger moderation of harmful or disruptive behaviour
6. Options to set limits on time spent in the community
7. Easier ways to report issues or seek help
8. Other (please specify)
9. None of these
10. Prefer not to say

[Qualitative_OE] {open} Please tell us what online communities you are part of, what you like about them and how you engage as part of the community. Be specific as possible.