



Press information

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58% OF ONLINE BRITS HAVE MET UP WITH A FRIEND THEY FIRST MADE ON THE INTERNET

LONDON. December 17th — New research examining internet social lives has revealed that six out of ten online adults go on to meet face to face with a contact they first made on the internet.

58% of those questioned in an online poll of 2,500 UK web-users have met up with an online friend – with 45% having had telephone conversations with friends they met on the internet.

The global TNS *Digital World, Digital Life* study highlights the intensity with which we conduct our social lives in the virtual world. UK respondents stated that on average 25% of all of their friends are ‘online only friends’ who they never interact with in the ‘real’ world. Across the UK we have an average of 17 friends who we first met online – rising to 25 friends for men under 25. Interestingly, although younger age groups have more online friends it is the older web users who actually have a higher proportion of their social circle online. Whereas 24% of 18 to 25-year-olds’ friends are ‘online only’, this rises to a third (33%) of 35 to 44 year olds’ friends.

Virtual friendships also span the globe. On average, each respondent reported having 17 online friends – from places as diverse as Azerbaijan, Nepal and Christmas Island! However, whilst geography is no issue in the online world, language is – demonstrated by the majority of Brits’ international online friends living in English-speaking countries (United States (23%), Australian (17%) and Canada (10%).)

However, despite our apparent ease with social networking, many people doubt the true identity of our online ‘friends’. 37% of respondents admitted that they cannot be sure of an online friend’s identity, and when it comes to interaction with families and real world friends, we still prefer to meet face to face – with email and online forum falling far behind meeting and phoning as the preferred way to interact.

Conducted in 16 countries, *Digital World, Digital Life* examines online behaviour and perspectives around the world. More than 27,000 participants aged 18 to 55 years old were interviewed online to see how much of their social life is conducted online.

Arno Hummerston, Managing Director, TNS Global Interactive, said: “What comes out in this survey is that we are actively engaging with people online, but we haven’t lost the knack for conventional social contact. At

the same time, online acquaintances are now perceived by most of us as real acquaintances. This is underlined by the high percentages of people who, having first met people online, go on to meet them in person or at least by talking on the phone. But behind that is the sense of worry among our respondents who clearly express concern about the true online identity of these apparent friends.”

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About *Digital World, Digital Life*

TNS completed analysis of the results of its 16-country study into online behaviour and perspectives around the world in June 2008. A total of 27,522 people aged 18 to 55 years old were interviewed online in the following countries: Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. 2,500 were surveyed in the UK. The research focused on four themes. First, the survey looked at how we are using the internet for entertainment, information and commerce. Second, the survey analysed whether people are using online channels when making major life decisions – health, family, education, investment etc. Third, how far social media has developed? Last, how much trust do people have in online sources of information versus traditional media or straightforward recommendations from friends?

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