

Facebook favourite with students despite privacy concerns, new survey shows

Brussels, 16 May 2011:- Facebook is the clear favourite among students using social media sites, despite strong concerns about privacy and the use of personal data, according to a new survey of 320 students of marketing communications across the world, undertaken by Warc (The World Advertising Research Center) on behalf of EdCom, the European Foundation for Commercial Communications Education.

The survey, whose aim was to identify students' attitudes to social media and their relationship with brands, confirmed that social media sites are popular with students because they can use them to form and maintain friendships (28%), share content such as photos (28%), share comments (22%) and discover new things (14%).

However, a significant minority of respondents expressed concern in relation to Facebook about privacy (33%), the use of personal data (34%), abusive comments (15%) and brand intrusion (13%). Only 4% stated that there was nothing they didn't like about Facebook.

The survey also explored the relationship between young people and brands, with 69% of respondents stating that social media impact on brands was positive, 23% neutral and only 3% negative. Asked which social media platforms they thought most appropriate for brand communication messages, the respondents cited Facebook (32%), YouTube (27%) and Twitter (23%) as the most popular. The only other sites to feature significantly were Linked In (6%) and FourSquare (5%), both a long way behind the leaders.

Young people are comfortable engaging with brands they like and trust – 29% have 'liked' a brand online, 25% have become a fan of a brand and 22% have joined a brand group.

Surprisingly, social media platforms are not the brand communications channels which young people think have the greatest influence on their purchase decisions. They rely most on word-of-mouth recommendation, followed by TV, online recommendation such as price comparison sites, then social media.

Although many different brands were spontaneously mentioned by respondents as using social media well, a few are clearly seen as leaders in this relatively new commercial territory. In particular, Apple, Coca Cola, Starbucks and Sony all received multiple mentions and are liked because they engage with consumers in a responsive manner, using humorous, 'cool' or practical content, such as events, which their audience is happy to access and share. Interestingly, despite concerns about alcohol brands using social media sites to encourage young people to drink more, only 1 spontaneous mention of an alcohol brand was recorded.

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On celebrity endorsement for brands, the overwhelming majority (71%) believe it has a positive effect on the brand, 23% believe it has no effect and just 6% think it is generally negative. Asked how many celebrities they follow on social media, 44% said none, 35% said 1-5, 11% said 5-10 and 10% claimed over 10.

The 320 students in the survey represent 21 countries from as far apart as Australia and Guadeloupe, but the predominant respondent base was from Europe.

Average age was 21-23 years, with a strong preponderance of female respondents (68%), reflecting the typical gender mix most advertising and marketing communications courses, with 76% intending to pursue a career in marketing communications.

EdCom, the European Foundation for Commercial Communications Education, was founded in 2007 by the European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA), which represents the interests of commercial communications agencies in Europe, and strives to promote excellence in commercial communications education and research and to further exchanges between the European commercial communications sector and academic partners.

EdCom's 35 academic members teach marketing communications in Universities and vocational schools in 17 countries across Europe & Australia.

“The 2011 EdCom student survey underlines the importance of social media in the lives of young people today,” said Olivier Fleurot, EACA President and CEO of MSL Group. “Furthermore, it shows how powerful the link between consumers and brands can be, provided that the brands respect the boundaries and privacy of their audience. The students' comments on privacy and use of personal data show that they are well aware of the issues inherent in social media sites and both the advertising community and the site owners should be careful not to exploit this privileged relationship. We are grateful to WARC for their support in this years' survey.”

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EdCom, The European Foundation for Commercial Communications Education was founded to promote excellence in commercial communications education and research, enhance communication and co-operation between the European commercial communication sector and academic partners, to facilitate cross-border education, employment and exchange of commercial communications students and to promote knowledge and understanding of innovative advertising and communication techniques and new use of media and other public platforms.

EACA, the European Association of Communications Agencies brings together the advertising, media and sales promotions agencies across Europe, enabling international experience and issues to be shared and dealt with on a pan-European basis. It provides an important link between agencies, advertisers and the advertising media in Europe and around the world and participates closely in the setting of standards in many aspects of the business across Europe.

Warc, the World Advertising Research Centre, is a global provider of ideas and evidence for marketing people, with the most comprehensive marketing information service in the world. WARC is a trusted resource, recognised for the provision of the latest in-depth information and cutting-edge thinking. Its online service is relied upon by the global marketing, advertising, media, research and academic communities, providing authoritative forecasts of advertising expenditure for all major economies, used by researchers worldwide. Warc.com is the single best source of case studies, best practice guides, marketing intelligence, consumer insight, industry trends and latest news from around the world.