

PCC research: Public concern about social networking and privacy

42% of web users aged 16-24 know someone who has been embarrassed by information uploaded on to the internet without their consent. And 78% of the entire adult online population would change information they publish about themselves online if they thought the material would later be reproduced in the mainstream media.

These are among the findings of new research into public attitudes to social networking, commissioned from Ipsos MORI by the Press Complaints Commission. It reveals the huge popularity of social networking sites in the UK today – used by 83% of 16 to 24 year-olds who go online and half the total population of adult web users. Yet, only just over half of users (55%) think before posting information that it might later be used by third parties without their consent.

Public concern is demonstrated by the fact that 89% of web users think there should be clear guidelines about the type of personal information that can be published online so that they can complain if this material is wrong or intrusive.

The PCC will be holding an event in conjunction with the Westminster Media Forum at the Royal Over-Seas League on Thursday, 5 June, at which representatives of the media, legal, online and political worlds will discuss these issues further.

Commenting on the findings and the Westminster Forum Event, PCC Chairman Sir Christopher Meyer said:

“Social networking marks a huge cultural change in the way in which people communicate. Personal information is being put into the public domain on an unprecedented scale. There is a need for public awareness about what can happen to information once it is voluntarily put into the public domain.

“This clearly has implications for the PCC, which has always had the task of deciding where to draw the boundaries between what newspapers and magazines may legitimately publish and what can rightly be considered private. The challenge remains the same for online editorial content, including material taken from social networking sites. In the digital age, self-regulation, with its sound principles and speed of operation, has never been more relevant. That is why I expect our current Code of Practice to be able to handle complaints in this area; and in the process to enable the Commission over the coming months and years to define through its decisions the boundary between the private and the public.

“But there are wider cultural and other issues going beyond the PCC to be debated, which is why we have taken the initiative of conducting the survey and holding today’s event at the Westminster Media Forum”.

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Notes for editors:

1. 1000 GB web users aged 16-64 were interviewed by Ipsos MORI between 14 and 18 March 2008. Participants were recruited via an online panel and the sample is representative of the GB online population. Click [here](#) for details of the research.
2. The findings will be discussed today at a forum of regulators and policy makers organised by the Westminster Media Forum in London on 5th June 2008.

3. The PCC is an independent body which investigates, resolves and adjudicates on complaints from members of the public about the editorial content of newspapers and magazines, and their websites. There are seven industry representatives and ten members of the public on the Commission's board.

4. For more information about the PCC, go to www.pcc.org.uk.

5. More information about Ipsos MORI can be found at www.ipsos-mori.com.

6. For more information, please contact Stephen Abell on 020 7831 0022 or 07659 158536.

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