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## News release

**'Digital waste' pollutes the online world as brands fail to listen to what people want**

***Global report from world's largest research consultancy, TNS, shows half of global as well as Chinese social networking users don't want to be bothered in social networks***

**Shanghai, Thursday 10 November 2011.** Businesses are wasting time and money trying to reach people online without realising many resent big brands invading their social networks – according to findings from a global study launched by today by [TNS](#), a Kantar company and part of WPP [NASDAQ:WPPGY].

The findings were revealed by TNS's Digital Life study, the most comprehensive view of how more than 72,000 consumers in 60 countries behave online and why they do what they do – an interactive data visualisation of the key findings can be found at [www.tnsdigitallife.com](http://www.tnsdigitallife.com).

The race online has seen businesses across the world develop profiles on social networks, such as Facebook or YouTube (or their Chinese equivalents such as Renren, Kaixin and Weibo), to speak to customers quickly and cheaply – but TNS's research reveals that if these efforts are not carefully targeted, they are wasted on half of them.

It found that 57 per cent of people\*\*\* in developed markets\* do not want to engage with brands via social media – rising to 60 per cent in the US and 61 per cent in the UK while the figure here in China is 52%, a bit lower than that of developed markets\* and just one percent lower than the global average (53%). Instead, misguided digital strategies are generating mountains of digital waste, from friendless Facebook accounts to blogs no one reads. This is being combined with ever-increasing content



produced by consumers – a staggering 74% of Chinese digital consumers write about products online, boasting the highest figure among all countries/regions studied. In comparison, 47 per cent of digital consumers globally comment about brands online.

The result is huge volumes of noise, which is polluting the digital world and making it harder for brands to be heard – presenting a major challenge for businesses trying to enter into dialogue with consumers online.

*“Winning and keeping customers is harder than ever,”* said Matthew Froggatt, Chief Development Officer, TNS. He continued, *“The online world undoubtedly presents massive opportunities for brands, however it is only through deploying precisely tailored marketing strategies that they will be able to realise this potential. Choosing the wrong channel, or simply adding to the cacophony of online noise, risks alienating potential customers and impacting business growth.”*

TNS’s Digital Life study asked consumers around the world whether they actually want to engage with brands on social networking websites – either to find out more or to make a purchase.

Although 54 per cent of global consumers\*\*\* and 60 per cent of Chinese consumers\*\*\* admit social networks are a good place to learn about products, the research shows brands must harness digital more carefully if they are to use it to their advantage and deepen relationships with customers and prospects.

The study also reveals big geographic contrasts which highlight the risks of brands employing a catch-all approach that doesn’t take the needs of different consumers into consideration.

Fast growth markets\*\* were found to be far more open to brands on social networks. Just 33 per cent of Columbians\*\*\* and 37 per cent of Mexicans\*\*\* said they don’t want to be bothered by them (the figure in China being significantly higher at 52%, very close to the global percentage of 53%), while 59 per cent of people\*\*\* across fast-growing countries (and 60 percent of Chinese consumers\*\*\*) see social networks as a good place to learn about brands. However, even here brands must still plan and manage online engagement carefully to avoid alienating consumers and doing more harm than good, according to TNS.

Serene Wong, CEO TNS Research International China explains: *“Digital waste is the accumulation of thousands of brands rushing online without thinking who they want to talk to – and why. Many brands have recognised the vast potential audiences available to them on social networks; however they are failing to understand that these spaces belong to the consumer and their presence needs to be proportionate and justified.”*

*“The key is to understand your target audience and what they want from your brand – social networks aren’t always the right approach. If consumers in one market don’t want to be talked to, can you use an alternative online method – creating owned digital media platforms, targeted sponsorship or search campaigns – to engage in an appropriate way that will achieve business results, without adding to the digital waste pile?”*



TNS's Digital Life study also sheds vital light on why people do engage with brands online. In China 47% per cent of those motivated (46% globally) to post comments on companies do so for the simple desire to impart advice – with Romanians the most helpful online (55 per cent).

Nearly three fourth of them write about brands. They do so to express their delight or anguish – almost equally balanced on each side - and to offer and seek advice. Here again China outdoes the rest of the world by proving themselves to be prolific expressers – offering both an opportunity and a threat for the brands. On the whole marginally more people like to praise than complain online. The Spanish are the least likely to praise online, with just one in ten people saying that they would do this, and Argentinians are the most likely to complain about brands online.

But to what extent do consumers trust the advice that they find online – here China is similar to the rest of the world – advice from friends is trusted and from others taken with a pinch of salt. China is little more easy to be influenced by negative comments though – 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of those who often read comments online say that even a single negative comment has the potential to turn them off.

However, motivations of online commentators can be self-serving. 84% per cent of Chinese consumers are driven to engage with brands online by a promotion or special offer. Again, China scores higher than the global figure of 61%. Chinese may have joined brand groups or may be following brands on Weibo with much interest and fervor. But they have a vested interest in that – they are looking for the best deals and promotions.

When examining global contrasts, TNS found that consumers in fast growth markets are incredibly keen to spend more time and money online than they currently do – presenting major growth opportunities for brands.

There are, however, infrastructure challenges still to be overcome in these countries before businesses can really tap into the enthusiasm for the digital world. Despite a significant expansion, even in China around half the consumers say that they would use the internet more if it was less expensive. This figure rises sharply in Africa, to 81 per cent of people in Ghana, 71 per cent in Nigeria and 68 per cent in Kenya.

Likewise, as high as 46% of Chinese consumers\*\*\* see social networks as a place to buy products, while only a quarter of people\*\*\* in developed countries do so. This trend seems to be true for fast growth markets in general, with some of the most eager online consumers are found in India, where 59 per cent see social networks as a good place to buy products from brands.

And when it comes to online shopping habits, Asian consumers are leading the adoption of group buying and purchase via mobile. Almost half (46 per cent) of digital consumers in China already use group buying tools - in stark contrast to Europe where adoption rates are as low as 6 per cent in Sweden and Finland.

Adoption of shopping via mobile is also high in the region – 34 per cent of mobile internet users in China and South Korea shop on their phone, falling to just two per cent in Egypt.



China also has one of the highest incidences in the world watching TV programs on the internet. Chinese internet users would often prefer to watch their Xin Huan Zhu Ge Ge on PPTV or Youku rather than on Hunan Satellite TV. TV channels need to make sure that they control the distribution so that they don't lose out on the advertising revenue.

Nearly half the Chinese internet users are regularly driven to the internet to find out more about a brand or a product that they saw advertised on TV or newspapers. This phenomenon is also significantly higher in China than in most other countries/regions. Chinese desire for detailed information is not satisfied from the brief encounters with the brands on the mass media and they will not rest till they get all the details from the internet. Marketers need to make sure that their digital presence on the internet is easy to access and detailed enough to satisfy the consumers.

Ashok Sethi, Head of Consumer Insights, Emerging Markets for TNS, adds: *“There is a huge appetite for increased internet access and mobile services among consumers in fast growth markets. Digital Life shows that as online communities mature, brands that can cut through the digital noise have fantastic potential to drive rapid growth from this nascent consumer base.”*

~ ENDS ~

#### Notes to editors

\*Developed markets: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States.

\*\* Fast growth markets: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Columbia, Egypt, Estonia, Ghana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, Vietnam.

\*\*\*This refers to Social Network Users only.

TNS has made some of the key findings from this study available to the public via an interactive data visualisation that can be found at [www.tnsdigitallife.com](http://www.tnsdigitallife.com). The visualisations were developed in partnership with Digit London.

Follow the conversation on Sina weibo: @tns\_ri.



## About Digital Life

Digital Life provides recommendations on how to use digital channels to grow your business through a precise understanding of human behaviours and attitudes online. Based on in-depth interviews with over 72,000 people in 60 countries, Digital Life's size, scale and detail make it the most comprehensive view of consumer attitudes and behaviour online, on a global and local level.

## About TNS Research International China

With the merger of formerly TNS Custom and Research International, TNS Research International China is cemented as the leading custom market research agency in China. With around 500 employees and more than 200 researchers across 6 offices in China, we deliver actionable insights and research-based business advice to our clients so that they can make more effective business decisions. We are committed to helping local leading companies win in both China and global markets and multi-national companies be successful in China.

## About TNS

TNS advises clients on specific growth strategies around new market entry, innovation, brand switching and stakeholder management, based on long-established expertise and market-leading solutions. With a presence in over 80 countries, TNS has more conversations with the world's consumers than anyone else and understands individual human behaviours and attitudes across every cultural, economic and political region of the world.

TNS is part of Kantar, one of the world's largest insight, information and consultancy groups.

Please visit [www.tnsglobal.com](http://www.tnsglobal.com) for more information.

## About Kantar

Kantar is one of the world's largest insight, information and consultancy groups. By uniting the diverse talents of its 13 specialist companies, the group aims to become the pre-eminent provider of compelling and inspirational insights for the global business community. Its 28,500 employees work across 100 countries and across the whole spectrum of research and consultancy disciplines, enabling the group to offer clients business insights at each and every point of the consumer cycle. The group's services are employed by over half of the Fortune Top 500 companies.

For further information, please visit us at [www.kantar.com](http://www.kantar.com).

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