New Research Shows the Impact of the Internet on Consumer Behaviour in Europe

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LONDON, 12 June 2008 â€“ Fleishman-Hillard International Communications, in conjunction with Harris Interactive, today announced the results of the Digital Influence Index (DII) â€“ a study designed to track and measure the influence and impact of the internet on consumer behaviour and decisions in the UK, Germany, and France.

Key findings include the following:

Across all three countries addressed by the study, the internet has roughly double the influence of the second strongest medium â€“ television â€“ and roughly 8 times the influence of traditional printed media. This shift in consumer influence indicates a need and an opportunity for companies to reprioritise the mix of communications channels they use to reach their customers.
Consumers use the internet in different ways to make different decisions. For example, consumers are more likely to seek opinions of others through social media and product-rating sites when making choices that have a great deal of personal impact (e.g., healthcare options or major electronics purchases). But they do use company-controlled sources when making transactional decisions on commoditised items, such as utilities or airline tickets.

While consumers see the clear benefits of the internet on their lives, they continue to have concerns about internet safety and the trustworthiness of some online information. In the UK, for example, 66% of online consumers say the internet helps them make better decisions, but just 28% trust the information companies provide on the internet.

Although most survey results were consistent across all three countries, use of the internet shows distinct national differences. Germany leads the three countries in Web research, for example, while UK consumers are the most likely to have created an online profile site on a social networking page.

"The research shows that the internet stands out as the most important communications medium in the lives of European consumers today", said Dave Senay, president and chief executive officer of Fleishman-Hillard . "But thereâ€™s a mismatch between the growing impact of the digital channel and the proportion of marketing and advertising resources organizations allocate to it, relative to other media. This study provides insights across a wide range of consumer behaviours and decisions that will help communicators be more strategic in their marketing mix.

"At the same time, we need to be mindful of consumer concerns about safety and trust," Senay noted. "That underscores the need for transparency and open, honest representation in our online engagement with consumers."

"This study was launched to provide marketers and other communications professionals with an annual platform for evaluating the evolving role of the internet in decisions that help shape consumersâ€™ lives," said Brian McRoberts, vice president, Fleishman-Hillard Digital Research. "It was developed to be easily replicable over time and applicable across cultural barriers. Many of these insights into consumer behaviour can aid in planning the specific brand- or corporate-level approach to engaging the public via the internet."

"The rapid rise, changing nature, and increasing influence of the internet should cause marketers to think differently about the entire media and marketing landscape," stated George Terhanian, president of Harris Interactive Europe. "By taking into account consumersâ€™ evolving preferences, needs, and desires, and balancing the beneficial use of personal data with the concerns consumers have for privacy, marketers can deliver more -- and more effectively -- for their customers in the online age."