

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## **Fears unfounded, networking sites add to Aussies' social lives**

CONTRARY to society's worst fears social networking sites such as Facebook add to Australians' social lives with only a minority of users experiencing harassment, research by Deakin University, Ipsos Australia and I-view has found.

In a study of 531 users of social networking sites, like Facebook, MSN, LinkedIn, MySpace and Twitter, Associate Professor David Bednall, set out to establish how people use the sites, in particular whether the sites are used to exchange information, and whether they had experienced harassment.

"Basically users of these sites are spread across the ages, not just Gen Y," he said. People use them to have fun and share a joke, so there's a site for instance which was set up just recently entitled "Come on Turnbull Don't Take Away my \$950". "They also use them for more serious purposes such as to support a particular cause or as a way of researching tourist destinations, looking at things like good countries to visit, good tourist attractions, good places to stay and places to avoid."

Associate Professor Bednall said only a minority of users experienced harassment.

"This may be because social networking sites are a relatively new phenomena but also because the people they are interacting with are friends and acquaintances who know you are on the site, so there are some social controls," he said. "But the boundaries between public lives and private lives are blurring."

"Of those who reported experiencing harassment surprisingly it was more men who experienced negative consequences such as fraud or identity theft than women."

Associate Professor Bednall expected social network sites to continue to evolve.

"Travelling around for jobs and work is getting increasingly common, social networking sites are one way for people to keep in touch and control the intensity of the dialogue," he said. "The interesting question will be how many people can you maintain in a network. Other research currently indicates that keeping active contact with about 150 people is most people's limit. Another emerging issue is Social Network divorce where people may find they suddenly disappear from their friend's group."

*The research was conducted in February using the Ipsos Australia and I-view's new custom panel and interactive forum software – the Talk with Australia Panel. The panel consists of 2000 Australian residents, representative to the population.*

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