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**INTERNATIONAL STUDY SHOWS CHINESE FEEL MOST IN CONTROL OF COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY**

An international study, led by the University of Cambridge\*, has found that people in China feel the most in control of their relationship with communications technology, with twice as many people in the UK, US, and Australia reporting they have felt overwhelmed at some time.

Despite many families seeing communications technology as a positive tool, a survey conducted as part of a study in the UK, US, Australia and China revealed that the number of people who have felt overwhelmed by communications technology is significant, with 40% in Australia and 37% in the UK and US surveyed having felt overwhelmed to the point of needing to escape. This is in stark contrast to China where only 17% report feeling overwhelmed. However, some simple steps have been identified to help improve well-being and to avoid technology overwhelming family life according to the BT-sponsored study released today (Tuesday 5 July 2011).

The survey of over 1000 people in each country and in-depth interviews with local families revealed that those people who have frequently felt overwhelmed are also more likely to feel less satisfied with their lives as a whole. Conversely, those who felt in control of their use of communications technology were more likely to report higher levels of overall life satisfaction. This has led BT to introduce a ‘five-a-day’ Balanced Communications Diet to help families get the most out of communications.

The research highlights that people in all four countries still prefer to communicate face-to-face, dispelling the myth that we are only communicating via technology or are losing the desire and ability to participate in in-person interactions. Moreover, the UK had the highest preference for communicating in-person with 65% of those surveyed in the UK citing face-to-face conversation as their preferred method of communication (compared to 59% in Australia, 50% in the US). Only 46% of people in China preferred communicating face-to-face, with instant messaging being their next favoured method. The survey also showed that 90% of adults and over 75% of children in China are using instant messaging on a daily basis.

China also revealed itself to be a nation of frequent gamers with 55% of children surveyed gaming every day; kids in the US were close behind with 49% gaming daily. Only 26% of children in the UK and 30% in Australia are gaming every day. Social networking is most popular with children in the UK; 90% used a social network on daily basis, compared to 81% of children in the US, 80% in Australia and only 61% in China.

Professor John Clarkson, director of the Engineering Design Centre at the University of Cambridge and Principal Investigator of the study, believes that those families who had better understanding of their use of communications technology in general appeared to have a more balanced and positive relationship with technology. He said: “Communications technology is changing the way that society interacts and now, with the explosion in personal communications devices, WiFi and increasing broadband speeds, is a great time to start charting this change. There is much discussion about whether communications technology is affecting us for the better or worse. The research has shown that communications technology is seen by most as a positive tool but there are examples where people are not managing usage as well as they could be – it is not necessarily the amount but the way in which it is used.”

Gavin Patterson, chief executive of BT Retail, commented: “Families and individuals who had rules in place to govern communications technology usage almost universally felt positively about the impact it has on their lives,” he said. “Importantly, the research revealed that technology itself is not the problem. Compare it to food. To stay healthy, you need to eat a balanced diet. The same is true when it comes to using technology; you need to find a balance which works for you. To help with this, we are launching the Balanced Communications Diet, our equivalent of the five a day you need to help maintain a healthy relationship with technology.”

As part of the research, 63 families from across the world kept a weekly diary of their hour-by-hour use of communications technology. Interestingly, many decided to make changes to their behaviour after filling out the diaries*.*

Sarah Jones, mother of four from Newmarket in the UK, commented after the study: “The weekly diary of communications was an eye opener for me and my family. It made me realise that I actually spend more time online than I thought. As a result, I have taken steps to reduce time spent online and, for example I now don’t turn the computer on until lunchtime. “

Other findings in the study include:

* **Amount of technology use in each country.** The % of people using communication technology for more than seven hours per day:
  + - **AUSTRALIA –** 11%
    - **CHINA –** 16%
    - **UK –** 19%
    - **US –** 21%
* **Amount of time spent on communications technology**: The % of people who feel they spend too much time using communications technology:
  + - **AUSTRALIA –** 44%
    - **CHINA –** 29%
    - **UK –** 59%
    - **US –** 43%

To help adults and children maintain a ‘Balanced Communications Diet’, using the research BT has identified the ‘five a day’ which people might use to help them have a healthy relationship with these technologies.

**\*** *Culture. Communication and Change:*

*An investigation of the use and impact of modern media and technology in our lives*

*Anna Mieczakowski, Tanya Goldhaber and John Clarkson*

*Engineering Design Centre, University of Cambridge*

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**The BT Balanced Communications Diet**

***Be aware***

***Before you can make any changes, you need to understand how you and your family are using technology.***

Many families who took part in the research were surprised and at times dismayed by their technology habits. Keeping a log of your family’s use of technology will help you identify good and bad habits and also changes you may want to make.

***Location, location, location***

***Think about where technology is located in the home.***

Parents often complained that their children abandoned family time to go on the computer or video game console in their room. Similarly, children reported feeling that they lost out on parents’ attention when they were ’quickly’ checking up on work in the home office. Keeping computers and consoles in a central location will allow your family to share what they are doing online, or at least all be in the same place while using technology.

***Have rules***

***Set some boundaries about how, when and where technology is used.***

Our research showed that rules around technology usage reduced anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed. The rules are up to you: try removing technology from the dinner table, organise a family games evening either with or without technology, use parental controls to manage use of social networks or the time spent on the family computer, or agree limits on the number of text messages sent in a day.

Just remember, whatever rules are introduced, it’s important to talk them through and agree them as a family – and parents sometimes need just as many rules as children!

***Education***

***Be a good example: teach and demonstrate the importance of balance and safety in the way technology is used.***

It’s important for parents to set good examples, so think about your own behaviour. For example,

avoid checking your smart phone unnecessarily when with your family. It’s easy for children to pick

up bad habits from you.

In addition, children are using technology at an increasingly early age and teaching safe and

responsible use is vital from the outset, it’s important to make sure your children are taking the right

steps to keep themselves safe.

***Find your Balance***

Don’t be concerned by overly positive or negative hype about communications technology. Every family and individual uses technology differently. We hope that this advice helps you find a healthy balance for you so that you have control of technology and are making the most of all forms of communication whether it’s by phone, email, social media or face-to-face.

A copy of BT’s a Balanced Communications Diet can be downloaded at: bt.com/balance

**Notes to editor**

**About BT**

BT is one of the world’s leading providers of communications solutions and services, operating in more than 170 countries.  Its principal activities include the provision of networked IT services globally; local, national and international telecommunications services to our customers for use at home, at work and on the move; broadband and internet products and services and converged fixed/mobile products and services.  BT consists principally of four lines of business: BT Global Services, Openreach, BT Retail and BT Wholesale.

In the year ended 31 March 2011, BT Group’s revenue was £20,076 million with profit before taxation of £1,717 million.

British Telecommunications plc (BT) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of BT Group plc and encompasses virtually all businesses and assets of the BT Group.  BT Group plc is listed on stock exchanges in London and New York.

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