



## **China Leads the US in Digital Self-Expression**

### **IAC and JWT study reveals new means of expression for China's Tech-Savvy Youth**

**BEIJING – November 23, 2007** – Millions of young Chinese are embracing the Internet as a discreet space for their thoughts and emotions, according to a survey of Chinese and American youth released today by IAC, which operates businesses in sectors being transformed by the Internet, and JWT, the fourth largest advertising agency network in the world.

The findings show how readily young Chinese are taking to the Internet and its possibilities—for example, almost five times as many Chinese as American respondents said they have a parallel life online (61 percent vs. 13 percent). And while fewer than half of the 1,079 American respondents agreed that “I live some of my life online” (42 percent), a sizable majority of the 1,104 Chinese respondents agreed with the statement (86 percent). The two random online surveys polled 16- to 25-year-olds.

The “Young Digital Mavens” study aimed to explore how attitudes toward digital technology are changing among Chinese and American youth at a time when people are spending less time with traditional media and more with interactive technology. China’s ballooning online population, estimated at 137 million, is now second only to that of the U.S. (165-210 million Americans, according to a July 2007 report from the Pew Internet & American Life Project).

The study found that while a large majority of youth in both countries now feel dependent on digital technology, this attitude is especially pronounced in China. As many as 80 percent of Chinese respondents agreed that “Digital technology is an essential part of how I live,” compared with 68 percent of Americans. The Internet is such a vital part of life for Chinese youth that they are twice as likely as young Americans to say they would not feel OK going without Internet access for more than a day (25 percent vs. 12 percent). And more than twice as many Chinese youth admitted they sometimes feel “addicted” to living online: 42 percent vs. 18 percent of Americans.

“The Chinese people seem to be way ahead of Americans in living a digital life,” noted IAC Chairman and CEO Barry Diller today in Beijing, where he spoke to more than 350 Chinese students at Peking University. “More activity online means a more connected and a more evolved workforce – just what China needs as it makes its move from being the workshop of the world, to a developed economy in its own right.”

“Like many other areas in comparing Americans to the energy and progress elsewhere in the world, China's speedy evolution in its use of the internet is fast eclipsing that of the US. I think this is great for China, not so great for us,” Diller added.

### **The Internet Means Test-Driving Freedom and Identity**

“For young Americans, the Internet provides an incremental increase in the huge range of options they enjoy in life, but for young Chinese it represents a steep increase in choice—and this is reflected in the strength of Chinese response to questions about opinions and interactions online,” says Tom Doctoroff, JWT’s CEO of Greater China and Northeast Asia area director. (JWT is regarded as one of China’s top three agencies in both size and reputation, and was named most creative agency in Shanghai by *Media* magazine.)

While most American youth grew up taking for granted both interactive technology and the “let it all hang out” ethos it has encouraged, these are new concepts for young Chinese. “Our findings show that Chinese youth experience this new emotional space—the ‘emobytes’—more intensely than young Americans,” explains Doctoroff, author of *Billions: Selling to the New Chinese Consumer* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Chinese respondents were four times as likely as Americans to agree that things online often feel more intense than things offline (48 percent vs. 12 percent). This feeling was more prevalent among Chinese men than women (52 percent vs. 43 percent), likely reflecting the fact that men were more likely to describe themselves as “dedicated gamers” (27 percent vs. 19 percent of women).

Young Chinese of both genders, however, are likely to find emotional stimulation and release online: 61 percent of both male and female respondents agreed that “I have felt strong emotions (e.g., anger, compassion) prompted by online interactions”; this compares with 47 percent of young American men and women.

While the Internet provides an outlet for young people everywhere who are testing out different identities as they seek to discover themselves, this is especially true in China, where it allows more scope for experimentation than life offline. More than twice as many Chinese respondents agreed that “I have experimented with how I present myself online” (69 percent vs. 28 percent of Americans). And in fact, more than half the Chinese sample (51 percent) said they have adopted a completely different persona in some of their online interactions, compared with only 17 percent of Americans.

This experimentation is clearly contributing to the development of self-awareness among Chinese youth. Far more Chinese than Americans agreed that “Online interactions have broadened my sense of identity” (66 percent vs. 26 percent) and that “Online interactions have made me more self-aware” (60 percent vs. 26 percent).

### **Finding Real Community Online**

The communication and community that interactive technology facilitates has a stronger appeal for Chinese youth than for young Americans. For example, more than three-quarters (77 percent) of the Chinese sample agreed that computer/console games are

much more fun when played against others online, compared with a third of Americans. And while fans of virtual communities are in the minority in both countries, “second-lifers” (those who agreed that “I feel more real online than offline”) account for just 4 percent of the U.S. sample compared with 24 percent of Chinese respondents.

Indeed, while many Westerners debate whether online experiences and relationships are “real,” far fewer Chinese have doubts. As many as 82 percent of young Chinese agreed that “Interactivity helps create intimacy, even at a distance,” compared with just 36 percent of young Americans. And almost two-thirds (63 percent) of Chinese respondents agreed that “It’s perfectly possible to have real relationships purely online with no face-to-face contact,” vs. only 21 percent of Americans.

These relationships are fundamentally changing the way Chinese youth interact with each other. Fewer than a third of Americans (30 percent) said the Internet helps their social life, but more than three-quarters of Chinese respondents (77 percent) agreed that “The Internet helps me make friends.”

### **Expanding the Sexual Universe**

Chinese culture may have a reputation for being far more sexually conservative than American culture, but strikingly, three times as many Chinese as Americans (32 percent vs. 11 percent) were willing to admit that the Internet has broadened their sex life. (It’s not just the Internet that sizzles for the Chinese: As many as 54 percent said they had made or heated up dates using text messages, compared with only 20 percent of Americans.)

“For many decades, the world saw China as a place of traditional and conservative sexual attitudes and ideals, but after the sex-blogging sensation Mu Zimei burst onto the scene in 2003, it became clear there was a lot of pent-up interest in sex,” notes world-leading trendspotter Marian Salzman, JWT executive vice president and chief marketing officer. “Four years later, our study confirms that the Chinese Internet is buzzing with virtual pheromones—‘cybermones,’ if you will.”

Adds Salzman, who managed this study in collaboration with IAC: “While relationships, dating and sex have been a prominent part of life online in the United States, the Internet just ramped up what was already happening offline—in China, however, it’s all new.”

Indeed, most likely due at least in part to the Internet, premarital sex in China has become far more common in the past five to 10 years. “In terms of impact on society and psychology, digital technology could be to China what the Sixties were to the West—a huge shift in mood and attitudes. The big difference is that these changes in people’s emotional and sexual lives are happening in the privacy of cyberspace,” notes Diller. “With interactive technology becoming increasingly important, it will be fascinating to see how those emobytes and techno-emotions affect public life as young Chinese become more accustomed to expressing themselves online.”

### **Free Speech Very Free Online**

In the United States, the land of guaranteed free speech, fewer than half of Americans (43 percent) agreed that “I often use the Internet to find the opinions of others or to share my opinions.” By contrast, China’s culture and political environment place less emphasis on personal views—and almost three-quarters (73 percent) of Chinese respondents said they go online to share opinions.

Chinese respondents were also more likely than Americans to say they have expressed personal opinions or written about themselves online (72 percent vs. 56 percent). And they have expressed themselves more strongly online than they generally do in person (52 percent vs. 43 percent of Americans).

That’s largely because of the anonymity that the Internet offers, a key attraction for the Chinese. Chinese respondents were almost twice as likely as Americans to agree that it’s good to be able to express honest opinions anonymously online (79 percent vs. 42 percent) and to agree that online they are free to do and say things they would not do or say offline (73 percent vs. 32 percent).

“One of the biggest differences between American and Chinese youth is in attitudes toward anonymity,” says Doctoroff. “In the U.S., with its cult of celebrity, young Americans see the Internet as a way of getting known, of building their personal brand; many regard the Internet as a kind of personal broadcasting medium. But whereas publicizing your name, face and opinions is seen as a step toward success in the U.S., in China it has been a surefire way of veering into dangerous territory. So for young Chinese, the Internet is the ideal place to air opinions and hear what others think without crossing the line.”

While a western ideal of individualism may not be in the near future for Chinese society, these findings show that the Internet is transforming China in a unique way – towards liberalism with Chinese characteristics.

### **Methodology**

In both China and the U.S., random online surveys polled respondents aged 16-25. The U.S. portion, which included 1,079 respondents, was conducted from Nov. 9-14 using SONAR, JWT’s proprietary research tool. In China, Millward Brown surveyed 1,104 respondents from Nov. 9-15; the survey was conducted in Chinese. The U.S. data set was weighted to balance the number of males and females surveyed; the China data set was weighted to balance out age-distribution differences with the U.S. sample.

While the U.S. sample is representative of America’s youth, the Chinese sample is necessarily weighted toward the young elite. Only about 10 percent of the Chinese population is online, largely young, urban and educated males. All Chinese respondents had a monthly household income of at least RMB 1,500. (See appendix for more demographic data.)

**About IAC**

IAC (Nasdaq: IACI) is an interactive conglomerate operating more than 60 diversified brands in sectors being transformed by the internet, online and offline... our mission is to harness the power of interactivity to make daily life easier and more productive for people all over the world. To learn more about IAC please visit <http://iac.com>.

**About JWT**

JWT ranks as the largest advertising agency brand in the United States and the fourth-largest full-service network in the world. Its parent company is WPP (Nasdaq: WPPGY). JWT’s heritage of brand-building excellence extends back to 1864, making us the world’s oldest advertising agency brand. In 1939, JWT pioneered the first national consumer research panel. In 1988, we created the first research study of consumer lifestyles, “Life Stages.” We believe in being anthropologists first, advertising people second.

**Appendix**

Basic Demos	U.S.						China					
	Total	Male	Female	16-18	19-21	22-25	Total	Male	Female	16-18	19-21	22-25
Base total sample (weighted)	1,079	539	540	374	207	438	1,104	574	530	405	225	475
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Male	50	100	0	62	45	41	52	100	0	48	46	59
Female	50	0	100	38	55	59	48	0	100	53	54	42
Mean age (years)	20.3	19.8	20.8	16.8	20.2	23.3	20.6	20.9	20.2	17.5	20.1	23.5
Mean annual HHI \$000 – U.S.	64.1	68.9	59.3	87.1	56.0	49.5	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Mean monthly HHI – China	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3,460	3,464	3,457	3,429	3,530	3,454

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