



Mother sues over tale of 'drunken party' lifted from Bebo

By Robert Verkaik, Law Editor

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It read like the teenage party from hell: a riot of sex and wanton damage fuelled by under-age drinking that only ended when the police arrived. According to media reports, the mother of the teenage hostess was so angry with her daughter that she punched her.

But Jodie Hudson's lurid description of the party on the social networking website Bebo, subsequently carried in a number of national newspapers, turned out to be fantasy. The media stories, and the accompanying pictures taken from Bebo, are now the subject of a landmark legal case that could redraw the boundaries of the use of information published on social networking sites including Bebo, Facebook and MySpace.

Jodie's mother, Amanda Hudson, is suing six national newspapers for defamation and breach of privacy after they ran stories based on her daughter's exaggerated claims about her party, held at the family's £4m villa in Spain, where it was suggested jewellery was stolen and furniture and a television set thrown into the swimming pool.

But Mrs Hudson says the party was anything but a drunken riot. In her letter before action to the newspapers, her lawyers say that the Hudsons employed private security guards to help supervise the private party on 3 May. The letter adds that nothing was stolen; no alcohol was served or permitted; none of the guests took part in sexual acts; the police were not called; and only minor damage was caused to one of the doors. Mrs Hudson also denies "punching or otherwise chastising" her daughter. In her claim Mrs Hudson says that, since the media reports, she has received abusive phone calls.

The case is expected to have far-reaching consequences for third parties who use or publish information from social networking sites. Lawyers say it could place a duty on all second-hand users to establish the truth of everything they want to republish from such sites. Mrs Hudson not only denies the allegations but accuses the newspapers of misusing information posted by her daughter on the Bebo site, saying there was no legitimate public interest in publishing material from the site. Mrs Hudson says that, because the information was inaccurate, the papers cannot rely on the defence of fair comment.

Her solicitor, David Price, said the case raised important issues of libel, privacy and copyright in relation to the unauthorised use of material taken from social networking sites. "Teenage conversation has always involved a large amount of embellishment..., but until recently it has not been communicated in a way that can potentially be accessed by the mass media," he said.

Mrs Hudson said her daughter has also suffered greatly because of the breach of her privacy. "Jodie is 15 years old," she said. "She

did not consent to the publication in the media of any photograph of her or her party, or of any material that she wrote on her Bebo site."