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## **Risks and opportunities of integrating social networking sites in the Australian and Portuguese workplace/communities: an exploratory study**

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**Abstract:** In this study the researchers aim to assess and investigate the risks and opportunities of using social-networking sites (SNS) in workplace/communities, especially in Australia and Portugal. An online survey was conducted of 80 employees from both large organisations and SMEs in Australia and Portugal to determine these risks and opportunities. The study outcomes indicated that SNS usage in businesses is very useful, convenient, and fast and provides a real-time environment for marketing, communication and collaboration, enhancing employees' knowledge and skills and improving communication between customers and stakeholders. However, SNS usage in businesses can lead to legal issues or loss of reputation, security, privacy, hacking to identify theft, and virus attacks. The current study ascertains new practical significance, as a set of recommendations were generated to minimise and reduce the risks of using SNS in the workplace and to meet employees' needs and expectations.

**Keywords:** social networking sites; SNS; opportunities; Australia; Portugal; workplace/communities; risks.

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## 1 Introduction

The use by businesses of information and communication technology (ICT) has become essential since it is capable of improving and enhancing communication and collaboration between consumers, stakeholders, suppliers, vendors, employees and individuals. Under the ICT umbrella, there are new technologies that allow businesses and individuals to utilise the many features of ICT. The internet and social-networking sites (SNS) are considered the most popular communications tools in the 21st century. These tools provide numerous benefits to the business sector and individuals simultaneously, from marketing, recruiting, communication, research, cutting edge developments, and acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Apart from businesses being able to reduce costs and increase profits, ICT can make them unique and more competitive in the marketplace.

In this study, the researchers will examine whether SNS is useful and manageable for businesses by assessing its benefits and disadvantages. By means of SNS, employees can interact virtually to complete specific tasks. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009, p.357), SNS is the new “hybrid element of a promotion mix”, which allows businesses to promote their image in the marketplace and to expand their total communication between employers and employees and consumers and stakeholders (Verhoevan et al., 2011). In general, SNS have created a remarkable change in the business world as many businesses across the globe have now begun to use this tool for collaboration, communication, cooperation, connection, marketing, customer service, management, and recruitment. However, it was noted from the literature reviews that,

until now, some businesses are still reluctant to use SNS for reasons of security, privacy, hacking, and legal issues.

SNS usage has extended from the individual to the organisational level as, according to Swensrud (2011a), it offers businesses a greater opportunity to improve enterprise-wide collaboration, communication and productivity without the boundaries of departments, geography and expertise. Employee profiles, status updates, feeds, filters and online chat have replaced e-mails and other means of online communications between groups and individuals, offering a better means of receiving, sharing, and managing information. SNS has become a tool for marketing, customer management, employee recruitment and knowledge-sharing and for creating a good workplace environment (Chen and Sharma, 2013; Langheinrich and Karjoth, 2010; Park and Lee, 2013). Moreover, Burrus (2010, p.51) indicates that using SNS in business will “enhance communication, information sharing, and collaboration, thereby allowing them to implement many innovative, even radical, business practices”.

This study will examine the benefits of and obstacles of using SNS in Australian and Portuguese businesses to identify the differences and similarity in the findings. From the literature review, it was noted that there are several obstacles that prevent the adoption of SNS, including security, privacy, and legal issues, to name a few. The drawbacks also include employee-related issues such as discrimination, improper use of work hours, and misuse by employees, and data leakage. On the other hand, several advantages of using the SNS in business include marketing, and time- and cost-saving. This paper is organised as follows:

- 1 background: social networking
- 2 social networking opportunities and risks
- 3 research question and methodology
- 4 participants
- 5 social networking usages
- 6 results
- 7 discussions
- 8 recommendations
- 9 limitations
- 10 conclusions.

## **2 Background: social networking**

SNS appears to be the most popular communication tool on the internet since there are more than ten billion social-networking accounts of which 17,327 billion users are active in 2013, while the number will be increased to 2.55 billion in 2017 (All Twitter, 2013; Dazainfo, 2013; Mulligan, 2013). This figure clearly indicates the internet users’ interest in SNS as it allows individuals to create profiles, share text and images, and link to other members of groups in order to develop and maintain a relationship with them (Hudson and Thal, 2013; Lin and Lu, 2011). The best-known SNS are Facebook, Twitter,

LinkedIn, and MySpace. Facebook is one of the most popular SNS, since it claims more than 400 million active users worldwide (European Travel Commission, 2011; UNCP, 2013). eMarketer (2013a) confirmed that the number of social network users around the world will rise from 1.47 billion in 2012 to 2.55 billion in 2017. In 2017, Asia-Pacific will have the largest social network population, and the Middle East and Africa. Furthermore, eMarketer confirmed that social network populations in India, Indonesia, Mexico, China and Brazil will increase as well in 2017. Social networking sites become very essential and important for businesses and individuals. Several studies (Buffer, 2013; eMarketer, 2013b; UNCP, 2013) confirmed that Facebook remained the number one social network worldwide with 67% of internet users in 2013, followed by Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram and Tumblr ranging from 16% to 5% of internet users.

### **3 Social networking opportunities and risks**

At present, businesses use SNS for communication, collaboration and marketing, and assist employees and employers to connect with their colleagues, create awareness among the employees about products, new technologies, and competitors. Currently, many businesses suffer from a lack of effective communication among employees and stakeholders, often resulting in a failure to meet service expectations and deadlines, which in turn negatively impacts on business. Some businesses use SNS for sharing scientific ideas which would otherwise not be made known, while others use SNS for arranging events, brainstorming and even project management (Mahajan, 2009).

Landman et al. (2010, p.381) post that about 20% of internet users share updates or view others' updates on websites according to the Pew Internet and American Life Project. Mobile technology has made this forum even more accessible as approximately 100 million active users access Facebook from a mobile device. According to Cosenza (2011) Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are the main SNS used in Australia, while Hi5 and Facebook are the most popular in Portugal. According to MVF Global (2011a), Facebook enjoys a 47.3% penetration in Australia with more than ten million Facebook users, while Facebook enjoys a 72.8% penetration in Portugal with more than 3.7 million users (MVF Global, 2011b).

SNS usage in business can reduce the gap communications between the employees in and businesses, as this tool can be used as a training tool where training can be easily carried out without prior arrangements like arranging a room, projector, etc., which can save time and money. New businesses can use SNS to source customers or to take their business to customers without any boundaries, geographical or otherwise.

However, notwithstanding the benefits of SNS, Langheinrich and Karjoth (2010) alert users and potential users to the risks associated with using SNS in business in general. It was noted that SNS had the potential to destroy a brand name who might have taken years to establish because this tool provides a very cheap means of carrying out a campaign. Hodgkiss (2011) confirms that employees may intentionally or unintentionally cause damage to the employer's reputation and brand by posting unfavourable comments about the organisation or information which potentially defames third parties.

Businesses can use SNS for many operations including: screening job applications and recruiting employees; creating communities for brands or to market their product; and marketing, sharing knowledge, disaster recovery, communication and collaboration.

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), many companies are already using SNS to create communities for brands or to market their products. Facebook is used for screening and recruiting job applicants via CIA and the accounting firm Ernst & Young to find their candidates, while LinkedIn is used to list professional resumes for individuals who are seeking a job locally and/or globally. Furthermore, employers are using SNS to check employees' backgrounds and interests. For example, Smith and Kidder (2010, p.494) cite the example of a company "withdrawing an internship offer from a 19-year-old student after the firm discovered a profile picture of her holding a bottle of vodka".

SNS can be used in business for knowledge-sharing. The advantage of SNS is that it allows employees and employers to reach cutting edge solutions to the difficulties and glitches encountered at work. Kane et al. (2010, p.67) posit that

"When two people share ideas, each one benefits, and when they each share it with two more, the benefits grow exponentially. Furthermore, SNS allows knowledge management and e-learning to pass knowledge along at this exponential rate."

Moreover, SNS now is playing an important role in the disaster recovery sector of business. Yates and Paquette (2011) confirm that SNS provides an open online exchange of information by means of conversations and interactions; also, it can manage the contents of conversation or interaction in the online environment. For instance, Facebook consists of links and nodes in the network which represents conversation threads, and this is online forever and can be retrieved when necessary. The public accepts these capabilities of SNS, but businesses have only recently realised their potential.

Effective communication is essential in any business. Most businesses lack an appropriate means of communication among the employees and stakeholders. SNS can solve this problem via posts, links, videos, and online chatting, as Wikis tools are usually used for this kind of communication. By using these technologies, employees can communicate and collaborate even with unknown co-workers to achieve the goals of the business. This also encourages open communication for employees. Even a low profile employee can take part in communication and collaboration. Some businesses use Facebook on a secure platform for internal communication (Aral, 2013; Begel et al., 2013; Burrus, 2010). Online communication will not be affected by any kind of geographical boundaries, time zones or dispersed personnel (Anonymous, 2009; Chen and Sharma, 2013; Metcalf and Benn, 2012; Park and Lee, 2013). By the same token, Bennett et al. (2010) show that staffs that engage in various communication activities like chat rooms, blogs, and posts can increase the productivity of a business.

SNS plays an important role in marketing to promote brands for business, information, entertainment, and social retail that allow customers to share their views about a brand and how to promote it. This type of interaction and feedback from the customers is essential for businesses and encourages them to create new offers, and makes changes and upgrades to existing brands or products.

However, there are some risks of using this tool including security, privacy infringement, loss of reputation, trust issues, breach of confidential information, infringement of trademark, discrimination, legal issues and others (Finin et al., 2005; Forrester Research, 2010; Langheinrich and Karjoth, 2010; Lin and Lu, 2011; Mahajan, 2009; Steinfield et al., 2009; Swensrud, 2011b).

A recent study by Issa and Kommers (2013) confirm that SNS can create challenges to employees and employers toward privacy/security, scams/harassment, intellectual property, control and access, law/cyber-attacks, time consuming, and bullying. These negative aspects "have a huge influence and risk on both organisations and employees from reputation, culture, vision and mission" [Issa and Kommers, (2013), p.12]. Therefore to avert these threats and fears, organisations should adopt a set of guidelines especially to avoid these aspects in line to improve their performance by using SN. This study will examine the risks and opportunities behind SNS adoption in Australian and Portuguese businesses and identify a set of recommendations for SNS implementation to increase predictions and reduce the jeopardies.

#### **4 Research question and methodology**

For this study, the researchers will examine the risks and opportunities behind SNS adoption in businesses, especially in Australian and Portuguese enterprises. The study question is "What are the risks and opportunities associated with using SNS in organisations?" Based on the findings, the researchers will develop a set of recommendations which will assist businesses in general and their employees when considering the adoption of SNS in their organisations, keeping in mind the risks and advantages of introducing SNS in the workplace.

To carry out this study, an online survey was developed based on a review of literature that is related to social networking risks and opportunities. The online survey required both structured and unstructured responses with more structured questions and fewer unstructured questions (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). The structured questions were based on a five-point Likert scale and Contingency questions. The Likert scale consists of opinion questions on 1 to 5 bi-polar scales. The five points on the scale in this survey were: 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. Respondents were asked to select the one that best reflected their level of agreement or the importance that they attached to each statement (Cavana et al., 2001; Gordon and McNew, 2008; Karkukly, 2011; Likert, 1932; O'Brien and Toms, 2010; Sekaran, 2003). As for contingency questions, the researchers provided a section for participants to write down other comments regarding each part. The method of using an online survey is preferable to traditional methods such as mail and personal interviews, as it is simple, more efficient, and less costly. However, an online survey has certain disadvantages in terms of security, privacy, hacking threats and system errors, each of which could decrease the response rate (Couper et al., 2001; Dillman, 2007; Fan and Yan, 2010; Fleming and Bowden, 2009; Gordon and McNew, 2008; O'Brien and Toms, 2010).

The online survey was divided into six parts, as each part discussed specific items, which are required to assist the researchers to examine the benefits of and barriers to SNS adoption by Australian and Portuguese businesses. All the pages of the online survey provided enough instructions and guidelines so that participants could complete the survey on time. In addition, a progress bar along the bottom allowed participants to see how much more of the survey needed to be completed. A formal letter and information sheet was e-mailed to the participants, including the survey link. Each section of the survey was limited to three questions to minimise scrolling, and the concluding page thanked respondents for their participation. The six parts were as follows:

- Part 1 *Background information*: in this section, the participants provided some details about their: 1 – gender; 2 – age; 3 – job position; 4 – fields of study.
- Part 2 *Social networking usage*: in this section, the researchers ascertain which SNS is used by the participants for personal and work use.
- Part 3 *Social networking benefits*: in this section, the researchers observe the benefits of using SNS in the workplace.
- Part 4 *Social networking barriers*: in this section, the researchers scrutinise the barriers to using SNS in the workplace.
- Part 5 *Social networking impacts*: in this section, the researchers examine the impacts of using SNS at work that can affect an organisation's growth.
- Part 6 *Social networking policies*: in this section, the researchers assess whether participants have read the rules, policies, and regulations that are related to the SNS usage in business.

## 5 Participants

The participants for this study are from Australia and Portugal; the main reason for using respondents from these countries was to examine the similarities and differences between the two groups in relation to SNS awareness in organisations, since Australia and Portugal have a vast mixture of people, languages and cultures. In this study, the response validity was 60% and 29% for Australia and Portugal respectively. Table 1 shows that 56% from Australia and 64% from Portugal are male, while 44% from Australia compared to 36% from Portugal are female. The participants are mixture from public and private organisations.

**Table 1** SNS – gender

| <i>Gender</i> | <i>Australia</i> | <i>Portugal</i> |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Male          | 31 (56%)         | 107 (64%)       |
| Female        | 24 (44%)         | 59 (36%)        |

It was noted from the survey results that the highest response rate in both Australia and Portugal came from those aged between 30–46 years. Table 2 displays the number of responses and the percentages of each age group.

**Table 2** SNS – age

|           | <i>Age</i>   | <i>Response</i> | <i>Percentage (%)</i> |
|-----------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Australia | 18–29        | 21              | 38%                   |
|           | 30–46        | 24              | 44%                   |
|           | 46 and above | 10              | 18%                   |
| Portugal  | 18–29        | 74              | 45%                   |
|           | 30–46        | 81              | 49%                   |
|           | 46 and above | 11              | 7%                    |

Respondents from Australia were mostly from the accounting field of study, followed by economics and finance, information technology and then management. From Portugal, the respondents were engaged in the areas of information systems, technology, computer science and management. This indicates that SNS is used irrespective of the field of study (see Table 3).

**Table 3** SNS – field of study

| <i>Field of study</i>  | <i>Response</i>  |                 |
|------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
|                        | <i>Australia</i> | <i>Portugal</i> |
| Accounting             | 26%              | 18%             |
| Business law           | 8%               | 5%              |
| Economics and finance  | 13%              | 20%             |
| Information systems    | 4%               | 34%             |
| Information technology | 13%              | 32%             |
| Computer science       | 4%               | 32%             |
| Management             | 9%               | 57%             |
| Marketing              | 6%               | 17%             |
| Health sciences        | 4%               | 1%              |
| Humanities             | 9%               | 4%              |
| Science and humanities | 4%               | 14%             |

## 6 Social networking usage

In this section, the researchers determine the SNS that is used by participants for personal and work use. The survey result showed 65% of Australian respondents have a personal SNS compared with 75% of the Portuguese. This confirmed that both groups of respondents are skilled in the use of SNS (see Table 4).

**Table 4** SNS – do you use SNS for personal use

| <i>Do you use SNS for personal use</i> | <i>Response</i>      |                     |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                                        | <i>Australia (%)</i> | <i>Portugal (%)</i> |
| Yes                                    | 65%                  | 75%                 |
| No                                     | 35%                  | 6%                  |
| Maybe                                  | 0%                   | 19%                 |

It was interesting to note that Facebook is the primary personal SNS for communications and collaboration among Australian and Portuguese at 100% and 97% respectively (see Table 5).

**Table 5** SNS – which SNS do you use for personal use

| <i>Which of the following SNS do you use<br/>(for personal use)</i> | <i>Response</i>      |                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                                                                     | <i>Australia (%)</i> | <i>Portugal (%)</i> |
| Facebook                                                            | 100%                 | 97%                 |
| Twitter                                                             | 17%                  | 15%                 |
| LinkedIn                                                            | 33%                  | 41%                 |
| MySpace                                                             | 8%                   | 3%                  |
| Other (please specify)                                              | 0%                   | 8%                  |

The survey asked respondents to state whether the SNS used in the workplace was the same as the one used in personal life (see Table 6). It was noted that 41% of Portuguese respondents use SNS for professional use compared with 29% of their Australian counterparts.

**Table 6** SNS-do you use SNS for professional use

| <i>Do you use SNS for professional use?</i> | <i>Response</i>      |                     |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                                             | <i>Australia (%)</i> | <i>Portugal (%)</i> |
| Yes                                         | 29%                  | 41%                 |
| No                                          | 71%                  | 50%                 |
| Maybe                                       | 0%                   | 9%                  |

The SNS used by respondents in the workplace are indicated in Table 7. The survey confirmed that LinkedIn led in Australia with 81%, while Facebook was predominant in Portugal with 75%.

**Table 7** SNS – which SNS do you use for personal use

| <i>Which of the following SNS do you use?<br/>(for professional use)</i> | <i>Response</i>    |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
|                                                                          | <i>Australia %</i> | <i>Portugal (%)</i> |
| Facebook                                                                 | 25%                | 75%                 |
| Twitter                                                                  | 19%                | 13%                 |
| LinkedIn                                                                 | 81%                | 60%                 |
| MySpace                                                                  | 0%                 | 4%                  |
| Other (please specify)                                                   | 19%                | 10%                 |

The above results confirmed that businesses in Australia and Portugal are aiming to use and integrate the latest technology in their businesses to enhance the communication, information, sharing and collaboration between management, staff and stakeholders, and

this will lead them to being unique and innovative in the market locally and globally. By the same token, several studies (Bennett et al., 2010; Langheinrich and Karjoth, 2010; Swensrud, 2011b) indicate that implementing SNS in the business sector will bring various advantages and opportunities from innovation and modernisation, and will make them unique and exceptional in their business practices.

## **7 Results**

In this section, the researchers will examine the reaction and attitudes of respondents comprising Australian and Portuguese employees in large and medium organisations toward SNS. This section will discuss the following:

- 1 social networking benefits
- 2 social networking barriers
- 3 social networking impacts
- 4 social networking policies.

### *7.1 Social networking benefits*

In this section, the researchers discuss the benefits of using SNS in the workplace.

From the survey outcomes (see Table 8), it was noted that both the Australian and Portuguese respondents confirmed that SNS will assist them in the workplace to improve the communication and collaboration between the employees in their organisations, since this tool is very handy for sharing information and knowledge among employees, as well for recruitment purposes. On another hand, it was noted that very significant results ( $t = 2.524$ ;  $df = 79$ ;  $p = 0.0136$ ) were generated by this survey in relation to improved communication with clients and other stakeholders by using SNS. Australian employees did not support this idea compared with the Portuguese employees who concurred with Waters et al.'s (2009) findings that SNS can help organisations to stay connected with their stakeholders regardless of time and provide assistance, thereby developing a good relationship with them. Bennett et al. (2010) corroborate that staff that engages in various communication activities like chat rooms, blogs, and posts can increase the productivity of an organisation. Furthermore, the survey produced an interesting result and very significant in relation to the use of the SNS as good marketing tools for organisations ( $t = 2.962$ ;  $df = 79$ ;  $p = 0.0086$ ), as Portuguese employees believed that this tool will encourage business and promote their organisation in contrast to the Australian employees who indicated that SNS "as a promotion/marketing tool, and for recruitment it does have a place but needs to be matched to specific target groups". On the other hand, Judge (2010) states that SNS is an important tool for promoting brands or marketing.

**Table 8** SNS benefits

| <i>Social networking sites can help in carrying out major tasks in the work place</i>                            | Country   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Responses | Mean | STDEV | Means comparisons<br><i>t test</i>            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|-----------|------|-------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Social networking sites are really useful in the work place.                                                     | Australia | 1                 | 3        | 14      | 11    | 4              | 33        | 3.36 | 1.05  | $t = 0.4733$ ;<br>$df = 80$ ;<br>$p = 0.6373$ |
|                                                                                                                  | Portugal  | 4                 | 3        | 12      | 26    | 4              | 49        | 3.47 | 1.02  |                                               |
| Social networking sites can improve communication inside an organisation.                                        | Australia | 0                 | 3        | 16      | 8     | 6              | 33        | 3.52 | 0.91  | $t = 0.5229$ ;<br>$df = 80$ ;<br>$p = 0.6025$ |
|                                                                                                                  | Portugal  | 3                 | 1        | 13      | 26    | 6              | 49        | 3.63 | 0.95  |                                               |
| Social networking sites can improve communication with clients and other stakeholders.                           | Australia | 0                 | 5        | 11      | 9     | 8              | 33        | 3.61 | 1.03  | $t = 2.524$ ;<br>$df = 79$ ;<br>$p = 0.0136$  |
|                                                                                                                  | Portugal  | 1                 | 1        | 4       | 27    | 15             | 48        | 4.13 | 0.82  |                                               |
| Social networking sites are a good marketing tool for organisations.                                             | Australia | 0                 | 1        | 6       | 16    | 10             | 33        | 4.06 | 0.79  | $t = 2.962$ ;<br>$df = 79$ ;<br>$p = 0.0086$  |
|                                                                                                                  | Portugal  | 0                 | 0        | 4       | 17    | 28             | 49        | 4.49 | 0.65  |                                               |
| Collaboration (sharing knowledge, views) between the employees can be improved by using social networking sites. | Australia | 0                 | 3        | 13      | 10    | 7              | 33        | 3.64 | 0.93  | $t = 0.3475$ ;<br>$df = 80$ ;<br>$p = 0.7291$ |
|                                                                                                                  | Portugal  | 1                 | 4        | 15      | 24    | 5              | 49        | 3.57 | 0.87  |                                               |
| Social networking sites can be used for recruitment purposes, to filter candidates.                              | Australia | 2                 | 7        | 6       | 13    | 5              | 33        | 3.36 | 1.17  | $t = 1.196$ ;<br>$df = 80$ ;<br>$p = 0.2353$  |
|                                                                                                                  | Portugal  | 1                 | 7        | 9       | 23    | 9              | 49        | 3.65 | 1.01  |                                               |

The majority of respondents confirmed that the integration of SNS in business practice will enhance both internal and external communication and collaboration. Respondents made the following observations:

- A great medium for communicating with students (Respondent 1).
- Helps me to network, connect and build relationships with work colleagues (Respondent 2).
- Communication through these sites is un-regulated so not likely to contribute to effective communication, and more likely to distract from overall impact of communication within internal staff groups. Other tools are internally available for communication, still prefer personally (Respondent 3).
- A SNS should not be used as a screening tool for a business position. LinkedIn is an extremely useful site, as someone in the corporate world (Respondent 4).
- In real estate, SNS is very useful. For recruitment, SNS could be used; the candidates should not be convinced (Respondent 5).
- LinkedIn can be very useful for recruitment purposes and advertising for positions (Respondent 6).
- We use LinkedIn extensively for business purposes. Staffs have professional LinkedIn memberships paid for by the company. Other non-professional sites are blocked at work (Respondent 7).

## 7.2 *Social networking barriers*

In this section, the researchers discuss the obstacles to using SNS in the workplace.

Furthermore, the researchers continue to examine the Australian and Portuguese employees' attitudes toward security issues, privacy, legal issues, and confidentiality associated with SNS. Table 9 shows that both Australian and Portuguese employees shared a common concern about security in social networking since it produces a major dilemma for organisations, especially when releasing confidential information about their clients and other organisations. The comments from respondents show that organisations must have their own social-networking profiles, and policies must be complied with. Employees must use common sense when using SNS at work. Some employees feel that SNS distracts them at work, but generally, respondents suggest that employees must follow company policy when using SNS in the workplace.

Both Australian and Portuguese respondents confirmed that SNS can pose risks to organisations in terms of security and confidentiality.

- Common sense is strongly suggested by users (Respondent 8).
- I use SNS at work a lot, but probably should not – it is a bad distraction! (Respondent 9).
- As long as it is used appropriately, it can be a great tool for the workplace (Respondent 10).

- Policies and controls need to be in place to ensure staff understand the risks and know how to use the sites properly. Each branch office has dedicated LinkedIn champion who assists staff in using LinkedIn in a safe and appropriate manner. Risks remain, however (Respondent 11).
- Social media policies should be in place to ensure so networking sites are used appropriately at work. I think they should be used for either social or professional purposes only – not a composite of the two. For example, I use Facebook social and LinkedIn strictly as a work tool (Respondent 12).

Finally, the security aspect is of concern to both organisations and individual employees. According to Shin (2010), to date, most of the SNS are weak in terms of security, access controls and privacy. Therefore, both parties should consider the security issue very carefully before SNS implementation.

### *7.3 Social networking impacts*

In this section, the researchers examine the impact, on an organisation's growth, of using SNS at work.

Furthermore, the researchers endeavour to assess the employees' knowledge and experience of using SNS in the workplace, in Australia and Portugal. Table 10 shows that Australian and Portuguese employees confirmed that using the SNS can pose risks. For instance, there is the possibility of misuse by employees from downloading large files, posting pictures and videos and releasing and leaking information about their organisations via the SNS. Moreover, poor marketing can cause legal problems regarding copyright and trademark, although on the other hand, the SNS is a cost-effective means of promoting brands. Significantly, both Australian and Portuguese respondents ( $t = 2.759$ ;  $df = 76$ ;  $p = 0.0073$ ) believe that using SNS can improve team work and productivity, and save money, although the Portuguese employees are more in favour of using the SNS to achieve these outcomes, compared with their Australian counterparts.

Finally, the majority of the respondents added their concerns about and perspectives of the social-networking impacts on business organisations in Australia and Portugal. Although this tool can provide advantages and benefits to organisations, there are also risks that can jeopardise business. Therefore, each organisation should develop a set of guidelines to minimise the dangers and hazards of working with this tool. Here are several respondents' comments regarding the social-networking impacts.

- SNS is just an extension of other forms of communication, and all forms are open to abuse in different ways (Respondent 13).
- I see them as a necessary evil... there is a lot of risk. Each organisation should undertake a risk assessment to see whether their organisation will benefit from social network usage and to ascertain what the main risks are for their industry (Respondent 14).
- The use of a social media needed to be managed and moderated as it can be a strong distraction as well as a tool (Respondent 15).

**Table 9** SNS barriers

|                                                                                                                                                                                        | Country   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Responses | Mean | STDEV | Means comparisons t test               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|-----------|------|-------|----------------------------------------|
| <p><i>There are several barriers related to using social networking sites at work, they include security issues, privacy, legal issues, confidentiality and others</i></p>             | Australia | 0                 | 3        | 5       | 15    | 10             | 33        | 3.97 | 0.92  | t = 0.05183;<br>df = 80;<br>p = 0.9588 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 0                 | 3        | 5       | 27    | 10             | 45        | 3.98 | 0.78  |                                        |
| <p>Using social networking sites at work can impact on the security of important data (i.e., user details, client details and other confidential information).</p>                     | Australia | 0                 | 2        | 7       | 16    | 8              | 33        | 3.91 | 0.84  | t = 0.9685;<br>df = 76;<br>p = 0.3359  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 0                 | 1        | 4       | 31    | 9              | 45        | 4.07 | 0.62  |                                        |
| <p>Using social networking sites at the work place can interfere in the privacy of both the employee and the organisation.</p>                                                         | Australia | 0                 | 2        | 3       | 19    | 9              | 33        | 4.06 | 0.79  | t = 1.073;<br>df = 76;<br>p = 0.2868   |
|                                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 0                 | 2        | 10      | 25    | 8              | 45        | 3.87 | 0.76  |                                        |
| <p>Organisation may face legal consequences for activities carried out by employees on social networking sites (e.g., posting comments, videos, pictures in Facebook, Twitter...).</p> | Australia | 2                 | 6        | 16      | 8     | 1              | 33        | 3.00 | 0.90  | t = 0.2108;<br>df = 77;<br>p = 0.8336  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 1                 | 14       | 19      | 10    | 2              | 46        | 2.96 | 0.78  |                                        |
| <p>It is safe to use social networking sites at work.</p>                                                                                                                              | Australia | 2                 | 6        | 16      | 8     | 1              | 33        | 3.00 | 0.90  | t = 0.2108;<br>df = 77;<br>p = 0.8336  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 1                 | 14       | 19      | 10    | 2              | 46        | 2.96 | 0.78  |                                        |

**Table 10** SNS impacts

|                                                                                                                                | Country   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Responses | Mean | STDEV | Means comparisons<br><i>t</i> test            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|-----------|------|-------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Using social networking sites at work may lead to misuse by users (e.g., downloading large files, posting pictures or videos). | Australia | 1                 | 1        | 6       | 19    | 6              | 33        | 3.85 | 0.87  | $t = 0.2131$ ;<br>$df = 76$ ;<br>$p = 0.8318$ |
|                                                                                                                                | Portugal  | 0                 | 4        | 4       | 30    | 7              | 45        | 3.89 | 0.78  |                                               |
| Using social networking sites risks data leakage in and out of the organisation.                                               | Australia | 0                 | 5        | 9       | 13    | 6              | 33        | 3.61 | 0.97  | $t = 1.156$ ;<br>$df = 75$ ;<br>$p = 0.2512$  |
|                                                                                                                                | Portugal  | 0                 | 1        | 10      | 29    | 4              | 44        | 3.82 | 0.62  |                                               |
| Poor marketing can lead to legal problems regarding copyright, trademark, and others.                                          | Australia | 0                 | 1        | 8       | 19    | 5              | 33        | 3.85 | 0.71  | $t = 0.4877$ ;<br>$df = 76$ ;<br>$p = 0.6272$ |
|                                                                                                                                | Portugal  | 0                 | 2        | 7       | 28    | 8              | 45        | 3.93 | 0.72  |                                               |
| Using social networking sites is a cost effective way of promoting brands.                                                     | Australia | 0                 | 1        | 4       | 19    | 9              | 33        | 4.09 | 0.72  | $t = 1.470$ ;<br>$df = 76$ ;<br>$p = 0.1468$  |
|                                                                                                                                | Portugal  | 0                 | 0        | 3       | 25    | 17             | 45        | 4.31 | 0.60  |                                               |
| Social networking sites can improve team work, productivity, save time and money.                                              | Australia | 2                 | 7        | 16      | 5     | 3              | 33        | 3.00 | 1.00  | $t = 2.759$ ;<br>$df = 76$ ;<br>$p = 0.0073$  |
|                                                                                                                                | Portugal  | 1                 | 4        | 13      | 21    | 6              | 45        | 3.60 | 0.91  |                                               |

*There are several impacts related to using social networking sites usage at work that can affect an organisation's growth*

#### 7.4 *Social networking policies*

In this section, the researchers assess whether the participants have read the rules, policies, and regulations that are related to the use of social-networking in business.

Table 11 shows that both Australian and Portuguese respondents confirmed and endorsed that policies and guidelines for implementing SNS in organisations are essential, and that, before the implementation of SNS, an organisation's management must develop strict guidelines and policies to control the information internally and externally and ensure that their employees follow the guidelines and are aware of the consequences of non-compliance, especially in relation to security and privacy. However, Portuguese respondents were unconvinced and unsure that employees should follow workplace policies when using SNS at work, compared with Australian respondents who were very keen to adopt these guidelines. Furthermore, another significant result emerged in relation to an administrator in the organisation monitoring the employees who can access SNS. Australian respondents were against this idea as this can threaten their security and privacy both internally and externally (Broughton et al., 2009). On the other hand, other studies confirmed that employees have major concerns about social-networking services in relation to the intellectual property copyright in terms of who will have control over "who gets to view what they publish" (Clarke, 2010). Therefore, to solve this problem, an agreement should be established between employees and organisations to ensure that there is an understanding of employees' rights to privacy and security, especially when using social networking.

Finally, the comments from the respondents indicate that it is important to establish a policy in the workplace for the use of SNS. They also comment that employees must be educated in using SNS more effectively and the employer has the right to take action against employees if inappropriate behaviour is imputed to the organisation. Here are some comments from the respondents regarding social-networking policies.

- Providing a regulated and monitored framework for use of social sites, highlighting individual's responsibilities for appropriate use is critical to ensuring these sites provide value to organisations (Respondent 16).
- Workplace has the right to take action against employees if something is reported inappropriately about the firm (Respondent 17).
- Educating staff to use SNS are more effective and just more important than implementing policies and monitoring of usage (Respondent 18).

With regards to workplace policy, these needs to be clearly indicated in the policy documents and included within terms and conditions of use documents that all staff sign and agree to when joining the organisation.

- Further, regular updates and reminders need to be issued to ensure staffs are aware of their responsibilities (Respondent 19).

**Table 11** SNS policies

|                                                                                                                                                                        | Country   | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Responses | Mean | STDEV | Means comparisons<br><i>t</i> test           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|-----------|------|-------|----------------------------------------------|
| To obtain the best results from social networking sites usage, in a safe and secure environment, users have to follow organisation's rules, regulations, and policies. | Australia | 2                 | 0        | 1       | 19    | 11             | 33        | 4.12 | 0.96  | <i>t</i> = 1.173;<br>df = 75;<br>p = 0.2445  |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 0                 | 0        | 1       | 28    | 15             | 44        | 4.32 | 0.52  |                                              |
| Social networking sites can be used at work place with limited user privileges.                                                                                        | Australia | 1                 | 1        | 10      | 18    | 3              | 33        | 3.64 | 0.82  | <i>t</i> = 0.4214;<br>df = 75;<br>p = 0.6747 |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 1                 | 5        | 8       | 21    | 9              | 44        | 3.73 | 1.00  |                                              |
| Access to social networking sites can be monitored by an administrator in the organisation.                                                                            | Australia | 1                 | 5        | 1       | 22    | 4              | 33        | 3.69 | 0.98  | <i>t</i> = 2.436;<br>df = 75;<br>p = 0.0172  |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 5                 | 11       | 7       | 18    | 3              | 44        | 3.07 | 1.19  |                                              |
| Employees must be careful when posting links, pictures, videos, and comments about their work place or any other organisations.                                        | Australia | 0                 | 0        | 0       | 15    | 18             | 33        | 4.55 | 0.51  | <i>t</i> = 0.7625;<br>df = 75;<br>p = 0.4418 |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 0                 | 0        | 3       | 23    | 18             | 44        | 4.34 | 0.61  |                                              |
| Employees must read privacy statements, and the terms and conditions of the social networking site before using it at work.                                            | Australia | 0                 | 0        | 2       | 16    | 15             | 33        | 4.39 | 0.61  | <i>t</i> = 1.148;<br>df = 75;<br>p = 0.2546  |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 0                 | 1        | 7       | 18    | 18             | 44        | 4.20 | 0.79  |                                              |
| Employees must follow their work place policies when using social networking sites at work.                                                                            | Australia | 0                 | 0        | 0       | 15    | 18             | 33        | 4.54 | 0.51  | <i>t</i> = 2.104;<br>df = 75;<br>p = 0.0387  |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 0                 | 1        | 0       | 29    | 14             | 44        | 4.27 | 0.59  |                                              |
| Work place has the right to take action against employees who violate policy while using social networking sites at work.                                              | Australia | 0                 | 1        | 4       | 16    | 12             | 33        | 4.18 | 0.77  | <i>t</i> = 0.6648;<br>df = 74;<br>p = 0.5082 |
|                                                                                                                                                                        | Portugal  | 0                 | 1        | 5       | 27    | 10             | 43        | 4.07 | 0.67  |                                              |

## 8 Discussions

This study aims to examine the risks and opportunities associated with integrating SNS in the workplace. An online survey was developed based on the current literature review, and was conducted to examine the attitudes of 80 Australian and Portuguese employees toward the implementation of SNS in their organisations. Organisations may be exposed to several risks when implementing SNS in the workplace; these include security, privacy legal issues, and misuse and data leakage. From the employee perspective, the risks include discrimination, inappropriate use of work hours. SNS in the workplace has positive impacts in terms of marketing, efficiency and cost-saving. To resolve the SNS risks, organisations should follow certain policies regarding the use of SNS in the workplace.

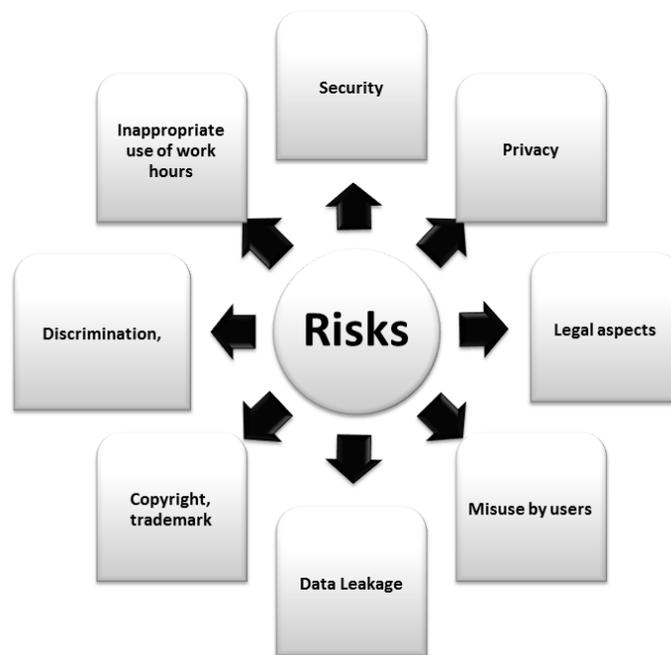
The study's aim and question were answered by analysing the online survey, as it was confirmed by the Australian and Portuguese respondents that SNS use by employees can bring opportunities as well risks. This study confirmed the SNS literature review as well new opportunities and risks are identified. The Australian and Portuguese respondents indicated that SNS use in the workplace can be advantageous to both an organisation and its employees, as it is a useful and simple tool that can be utilised for marketing, communication and collaboration among employees, customers and stakeholders. Customer satisfaction can be easily ensured by communication through SNS as their issues and queries can be attended to smoothly and in real time. The SNS can improve team work, facilitate project management, and promote knowledge-sharing (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1** SNS opportunities – prepared by the authors



However, SNS in a workplace can present several risks to an organisation. Firstly, employees might not readily adopt SNS in their work practices. Sometimes poor marketing can lead to legal issues or loss of reputation. Technical problems associated with SNS include loss of bandwidth by downloading huge files, videos and images, data leakage, and memory loss, virus attacks, phishing, identity theft, hacking, and network slowdowns. Recruiters might not conduct more than a background check of candidates unless it is necessary for a specific job profile. However, the details in the social-networking profile page may not be true, and the skills of a candidate cannot be judged by his/her social-networking profile page. It is moreover, a personal page of an individual; it must not be compared to any profession. Most of these impacts are caused by the employees, so they have to maintain self-control to minimise this and follow organisations guidelines and policies in relation to SN. From this study the Australian and Portuguese respondents confirmed that SNS use in an organisation can cause severe risks from security, legal and privacy, data leakage, discrimination, misuse, and inappropriate use of work hours (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2** SNS risks – prepared by the authors



Therefore, before implementing and using SNS in organisations, management must identify and justify the needs and benefits of using it. Although there are numerous benefits for organisations themselves, employees can also be advantaged by SNS in the workplace in terms of marketing, recruitment, communication, research, cutting edge developments, and acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Finally, the aim of this study is to produce some recommendations to any organisations considering the adoption of

SNS in the workplace. These recommendations may help to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with SNS. Organisations must have an understanding of the SNS they are planning to use at work. A detailed study should be conducted prior to the implementation or use of SNS at work or before allowing employees to use SNS during work hours.

## **9 Recommendations**

In addition to discussing the SNSs' benefits, barriers, impacts and policies, the researchers have also formulated a practical set of recommendations and endorsements which organisations are advised to consider before implementing SNS in their organisations. These recommendations were derived from this study and from the literature review (Cummings, 2013; eMarketer, 2013a; Kane et al., 2010; Keenan, 2009; Kelin, 2008; Langheinrich and Karjoth, 2010; Lin and Lu, 2011; Swensrud, 2011b; Velasquez et al., 2009; Weaver and Morrison, 2008). Before implementing SNS, the following recommendations should be heeded:

- organisations must choose the SNS that is right for their organisation
- organisations must assess their SNS before its implementation, and make appropriate changes based on employees' feedback
- organisations must work together with their employees when implementing SNS in the workplace
- organisations must ensure that all employees are made aware of SNS policies and guidelines before implementation
- organisations must inform their existing clients and stakeholders about the use of SNS in their organisation
- organisations must have a team of experienced administrators to monitor and control the SNS activities
- employees must sign a legal agreement before using the SNS in the workplace
- employees and stakeholders' common sense and awareness must be taken into account
- employees must use SNS only for work-related purposes
- employees must be cautious, ethical and honest when using SNS in the workplace
- employees must use their company profiles only for their work
- employees must not discriminate against or defame any other employees within the organisation when communicating via SNS
- employees must exercise care and discretion when handling confidential information
- employees must think before posting anything online
- employees must obtain prior permission and legal advice from relevant authorities before using SNS for marketing purposes

- employees are not permitted to download movies, music, videos or any other files that exceed a specified size
- employees should not share with customers and stakeholders any confidential information or any sensitive data regarding the organisation, personal details, user details, etc., in social-networking pages
- employees must consider the privacy of the organisation and other employees when using SNS
- employees must understand the privacy settings of the SNS they use at work.

## **10 Limitations**

This study examined the risks and opportunities behind SNS adoption in Australian and Portuguese enterprises. The survey concluded that using SNS in enterprises can bring various opportunities from communications, collaboration, cutting edge and recruitment; however, security, privacy and law are considered the risks of implementing SNS in organisations. This study was limited to 80 responses, however, to strengths the study aims and objectives, further study with substantial and distinct countries is required.

## **11 Conclusions**

SNS is the second most popular tool after the internet; many companies globally and locally are using the SNS to establish their vision and mission and to improve communication and collaboration among employees and stakeholders. The purpose of this study was to examine the risks and opportunities from the perspective of Australian and Portuguese employees. An online survey was conducted to examine the risks and opportunities associated with the use of SNS in their organisations. It was confirmed that Australian and Portuguese respondents, despite the vast mixture culture, and languages, confirmed that this tool improved the communication and collaboration among employees and stakeholders. Conversely, the use of SNS can pose risks to security and privacy. This study confirmed the literature review discussion to SNS use in organisations; as well, a new theoretical significance is added to SNS literature review to risks and opportunities. Finally, a set of recommendations was developed by the researchers to assist organisations to successfully adopt SNS as part of their operations. It is highly likely that social networking will continue to expand in the future. Most organisations are at the initial stage of using SNS and full implementation will take some time. In future SNS will be capable of handling projects, the process starting from the planning until implementation, but some kind of technology has to be developed to ensure security in each organisation.

The only way to use social networking in a secure way is by following organisation policies and guidelines. Moreover, organisations can develop their own social-networking platforms, which can be monitored and controlled smoothly. This can be implemented easily since it will be related to the nature of the organisation. SNS is an important business tool for organisations, as it connects employees in the organisation and encourages collaboration, teamwork, knowledge-sharing, and problem-solving in real

time, thereby reducing the work load and increasing profit. Overall, it encourages cooperation and collaboration among all employees in the workplace, but security, privacy and legal should be considered before the implementation by using guidelines or conducting a workshop in the organisations to raise the alarm behind SNS risks.

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