The Use of Social Network Sites in the Workplace: a Case Study in Brazilian Companies

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ABSTRACT

People are increasingly using Social Network Sites (SNS) through corporate platforms or open websites such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. As a recent phenomenon, the potential benefits and risks of such tools are still not properly addressed in organizations. The purpose of this paper is to analyze how Brazilian companies are using this tool to achieve their corporate strategic objectives. We conducted a qualitative case study and proposed a framework that classified the companies into three groups according to their position about SNS use in the workplace. The knowledge creation group benefits the social and intellectual capital generated by online discussion, while the corporate branding group seeks to strengthen the corporate image with customers. The administrative control group is more concerned about productivity, procrastination and data confidentiality. We also highlight the reasons for employees to use SNS during working time, the benefits and risks caused by formation of social capital and concerns about privacy.

Keywords: Social network site. Workplace. Social capital. Privacy.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Social Network Sites (SNS) are web-based services that allow users to construct an individual profile to interact with contacts and also to enable visualization of friends' network within the system. These sites allow users to learn detailed information about contacts, share it with specific or unspecific people and build online human-relationships (BOYD; ELLISON, 2008; KWON; WEN, 2010; VALENZUELA et al., 2009).

The use of SNS has been widely studied in the university population, especially because Facebook was primarily developed to serve this community. However, ordinary people are increasingly accessing SNS through open websites such as Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace and Facebook. Regarding the use of SNS, the Brazilian population is recognized for its active participation on these websites. Orkut had been the market leader in Brazil for seven years, reaching 29 million unique users, or 64% of Brazilian Internet users. In September 2011, Facebook surpassed Orkut and became the widest used SNS, with 30.9 million unique users, or 68.2% of Internet users (GEROMEL, 2011). Additionally, Brazilian users present the highest rates of sociability on SNS, as they usually achieve up to 360 friends, while users around the world have 195 friends on average (ALE, 2010).

Much of the existing academic research on SNS has focused on the reason for using it, creation of social capital, privacy and disclosure and personal factors affecting its use. There is a lack of studies in the organizational context. Dimicco et al. (2008) and Steinfield et al. (2009) presented the benefits generated by a SNS that was designed exclusively for IBM employees, with no possibility to interact with consumers, customers, suppliers or personal friends, for example. In the same way, Costa et al. (2008) and Costa et al. (2009) presented results from the development of an internal SNS to support knowledge management in a Brazilian company. Skeels and Grudin (2009) discussed the use of open SNS by Microsoft employees, examining the influence on productivity, its utilities and issues. We also found studies in Brazil about SNS use for business communication and marketing campaigns (SOUSA; AZEVEDO, 2010; BARCELOS, 2011).

In Brazil, 98% of the companies with more than 10 employees have Internet access. Among these companies, 36% have a policy of restriction to personal e-mails, 39% do not allow access to websites of news, sports or entertainment and 56% restrict the access to SNS (CETIC, 2012). According to Li (2010), it is crucial that companies decide whether to use SNS following their overall corporate strategic goals. More than that, companies should use a

common process whereby clear decisions about SNS use may be made. With this background, we set out to address the following question: “How do Brazilian companies use SNS to achieve their corporate strategic objectives?” The overarching purpose of this study is to classify Brazilian companies according to their position about SNS use in the workplace to achieve their corporate strategic objectives. Also, we intend to analyze how Brazilians who participate in SNS use this tool within the workplace and what the benefits and risks from its utilization are.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Most Social Network Sites (SNS) are structured around a profile and a display of connections, but they may vary to the extent that they support additional services such as blogging (LiveJournal), audio-visual content sharing (Flicker, Last.FM, Youtube) or status updates and mobile connectivity (Twitter). Also, they can be directed to a specific audience, such as work-related connections (LinkedIn), exclusive membership (ASmallWorld), romantic relationship initiation (the original goal of Friendster.com) or ethnic, religious, sexual orientation or particular content genres (ELLISON et al., 2007; PAPACHARISSI; MENDELSON, 2011).

The current popularity of Facebook can be noticed by the constant announcements about the increase in the number of users and time spent on the website all over the world. It was originally created as a site for college students in 2004 and an official university email address was needed to ensure that all users were members of the campus community. In 2006 it was opened to everyone with a valid email address (MAYER; PULLER, 2008; TONG et al., 2008).

Facebook provides both the technical and the social infrastructure for social interaction. For example, the tool provides technical support for communication through applications (wall posts, messages, comments) and information about users' contacts. The identity information serves as a social lubricant, providing clues about the profile owner's social status, physical attractiveness, credibility, cultural tastes and political affiliation, besides other personal aspects (STEINFELD et al., 2008; TONG et al., 2008; ELLISON et al., 2011). The size of one's apparent friends' network on a SNS can easily become much larger than traditional offline networks, because friendship is in some cases superficial, technology facilitates greater connection, and social norms inhibit refusals to friend requests (TONG et al., 2008).

SNS complement the network of relationships present in the offline world by providing a platform that permits active communication between friends and also engages in a form of passive observation of social news. This observation allows users to track the activities of a wide set of possible connections and might lower the barriers to initiating communication, both because potential commonalities are revealed and because crucial information about others is provided (STEINFELD et al., 2008, BURKE et al., 2010, VITAK et al., 2011).

The literature addressing SNS presents different theoretical backgrounds. In order to structure the description of case studies, we introduce the main studies according to four topics: organizational context, reasons for using it, social capital increase and privacy and disclosure.

2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

The existing studies about SNS present many advantages of its utilization, but many companies prohibit its use during working time by blocking employees' access to websites (BOYD; ELLISON, 2008). On this matter, Garrett and Danziger (2008) concluded that employees are surfing the web or sending personal e-mails during working time because these activities are considered to be similar to other everyday activities in the workplace, such as calling home or chatting with a coworker about any subject.

Skeels and Grudin (2009) showed that the use of LinkedIn and Facebook is widely accepted at Microsoft and is seen as providing benefits, such as creation and strengthening of ties. At the same time, it has caused some tensions from mixing personal and professional connections, from spanning organizational levels and also over disclosing confidential information. Besides this, some employees reported that it is a waste of productive time.

DiMicco et al. (2008) performed a study involving a SNS especially designed for IBM's employees and found that they were using it to reach out across team and division boundaries to connect with people with similar interests. Likewise, Steinfield et al. (2009) showed that when employees use SNS for keeping up with known colleagues, they report having closer ties with their immediate network.

In Brazil, Costa et al. (2008) and Costa et al. (2009) reported the implementation of an internal SNS in a private innovation institute, with the objective of supporting employees for creation, management and sharing of knowledge. The implementation of such tool resulted in a better relationship among coworkers through mutual cooperation, better communication and exchange of knowledge from any location.

Internal SNS can also provide a good source of information for human resources departments through profiles with up-to-date, relevant and dynamic data. The associated information relating to the connections, interests and activities of employees are instantly available and storable by the company, providing new information sources and new possibilities for understanding the workforce (DIMICCO et al., 2008).

Barcellos (2010) and Souza & Azevedo (2010) present the challenges that Brazilian companies are facing to communicate with consumers through SNS. They discuss the new methods to measure communication efficiency and how to structure actions to manage brand image, reputation and credibility in these dynamic environments.

Still about the organizational context, Li (2010) affirms that companies can use SNS to achieve the following four goals: learn, dialog, support and innovate. The first goal is about using SNS to know more about employees, customers and partners. The second goal is to dialog and transform a relationship from that of shouting out one-way messages to communication between equals. Support is about helping people from inside and outside the organization at different times and innovate is about fostering creativity. Companies should define their goals according to the corporate strategic objectives and, based on that, make decisions about implementation of internal SNS, access to external SNS and development of a specific policy for its use.

2.2 REASONS FOR USING SNS

About the reasons to use SNS, Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) performed a survey with college students and concluded they were primarily using SNS for social motives that involved people from their offline lives rather than looking for new friends, new music, or finding groups to talk about specific issues. Thus, students do not use SNS to meet and form connections with strangers and prefer to strengthen existing offline connections.

The reasons to use SNS vary according to demographical characteristics. Sheldon (2009) used gender differences and concluded that females were using SNS to maintain existing relationships, while males tended to use it as a dating tool and to establish relationships in general. Pfeil et al. (2009), on the other hand, explored differences between older people (over 60 years of age) and teenagers. They found that teens have larger networks of friends, tend to make more use of different media and use more self-references and negative emotions when describing themselves on profiles when compared to older people.

Lin and Lu (2011) used previous studies that relate motivation theory and information technology acceptance to propose two factors affecting individuals' motivation for SNS use: extrinsic benefits (usefulness) and intrinsic benefits (enjoyment). In the organizational context, people benefit from the use of SNS by the creation and strengthening of ties (SKEELS; GRUDIN, 2009). Employees use SNS to connect with coworkers on a personal level, apart from enhancing their careers through self-promotion and strategic connections. They also report SNS use as a means to move forward with their ideas, that is, to gather support for their plans and drive traffic to their project webpages (DIMICCO et al., 2008).

Lin and Lu (2011) found in their study in Taiwan that enjoyment was the most important factor affecting Facebook users' behavior. Thus, activities on Facebook such as posting photos and films, sharing links and applications and playing games appear to be a source of pleasurable experience. Also, the number of connections and perceived complementarity reinforce the usefulness and enjoyment of SNS, suggesting that with increased peer connections and complementary tools, SNS interaction becomes more interesting.

2.3 SOCIAL CAPITAL

The term social capital has been adopted by sociologists and economists to designate the benefits created by the relationship among individuals. Coleman (1988) affirms that social capital consists of a variety of entities that form a social structure and facilitates actions by actors within this structure. Like other forms of capital, it is productive and makes it possible for the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible. From a business strategy perspective, Burt (2005) states that social capital refers to the advantage created by a person's location in a structure of relationships. Thus, the connections, trust, support and dependence resulting from the diverse exchanges among people may form an asset to the organization.

Putnam (2000) delineated two basic forms of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital describes benefits from dense relationships, which may comprise reciprocity, solidarity, social and psychological support, reliable labor for local entrepreneurs or other close benefits. Bridging social capital consists of more sparse relationships, with benefits derived from distant acquaintances and connections, like linkage to external assets and information diffusion. Bridging social capital is linked to what network researchers call "weak ties", by referring to individuals that are more likely to move in different circles of connections and thus have access to useful information. Access to individuals outside one's

close circle provides access to non-redundant information, resulting in benefits such as employment connections, new opportunities and perspectives (GRANOVETTER, 1973, 1982).

Williams (2006) developed and validated the Internet Social Capital Scales (ISCS) – a series of scale to measure bridging and bonding social capital in Internet contexts. Using this scale, a positive relationship between Facebook use with the maintenance and creation of bridging social capital was found among college students in the United States. The social and technical tools provided by Facebook can encourage the conversion of latent ties into weak ties, but not necessarily create the close kinds of relationships that are associated with bonding social capital. Also, people reporting Facebook use to connect with ‘total strangers’ did not have an impact on their social capital, probably because connecting with strangers is not the norm on the site and users may be less receptive to these advances (ELLISON et al., 2007, 2011).

In addition to these studies, we can also find literature that includes psychological variables to better understand the consequences of SNS utilization. Steinfield et al. (2008) found that college students with lower self-esteem gained more from the use of Facebook, since they may face more difficulties in approaching people in their classes or dormitories. Therefore, Facebook might contribute to the formation of bridging social capital by mitigating fears of rejection and facilitating communication in initial social interactions. Valenzuela et al. (2009) found a positive relationship between the intensity of Facebook use and personal contentment, trust and participation in civic and political activities. Burke et al. (2010) also found that the greater use of SNS (text exchanges, non-text feedback such as the “like” button or photo tagging) may be associated with increased social capital and lower loneliness.

The constructs of bonding and bridging social capital are equally relevant within an organizational setting. Bonding social capital in an organization implies there is trust and a sense of obligation that encourages reciprocity and willingness to contribute to the company. Bridging social capital is associated with the kinds of weak ties that facilitate access to non-redundant information, greater interest in connecting globally, and greater ability to access expertise within the company (STEINFIELD, et al., 2009).

2.4 PRIVACY AND DISCLOSURE

Another topic that is commonly discussed in the SNS literature is privacy and disclosure. SNS removes the privacy barriers that people keep between different aspects of their lives as it makes one’s connections visible to all the others. Disclosed information may

be available to the entire network of friends and it can bring privacy concerns, because the way that one user interacts with a potential mate is different from the way one interacts with one's niece, mother-in-law or boss, for example (DONATH; BOYD, 2004; MCCLARD; ANDERSON, 2008).

Privacy concerns were already addressed when Facebook was still restricted to university communities. Gross and Acquisti (2005) showed that personal data was generously provided by students and they hardly used privacy controls. At that time, the authors were concerned about users' exposition, physical and cyber risks, and the possibility for third parties to create digital dossiers of their behavior. Still about the university community, Stutzman et al. (2011) explored students' attitudes and behaviors and found that the more an individual is concerned about privacy, the less likely the individual will be to increase disclosure.

About common Facebook users, Nosko et al. (2010) collected information from Canada and found that age was an important factor in determining disclosure behaviors, which means that as age increases, the amount of personal information in profiles decreases. The privacy concern can reach the stage in which users delete a friend or block someone from their profile. SNS users have indicated reasons for deleting a friend that ranges from losing contact, wanting privacy, and protecting one's safety from a "crazy stalker" or a "crazy ex-girlfriend" (SUBRAHMANYAM et al., 2008).

In this sense, it is necessary to develop programs and interventions to caution SNS users about the risk of personal information disclosure. SNS developers should simplify privacy policies to help users understand the implications of their disclosures and, besides that, create easier privacy controls or enable users to produce their own rules within the system (NOSKO et al., 2010; STUTZMAN et al., 2011).

In the organizational context, in which employees mix connections from professional and personal circles, there is a concern about people posting content that is offensive, alienating, needlessly provocative, irrelevant, or otherwise out of line with the goals of the organization (MCAFEE, 2009). In this respect, Li (2010) states that every company needs to develop and put in place a policy for SNS to create structure, process and discipline around openness. Organizations typically have two types of policy: social media guidelines for employees and customer-interaction guidelines, such as community participation or comment guidelines. The benefit of having a code of conduct and disclosure policy is the clarity on how

the company expects employees to behave in such environments, taking into consideration aspects of identity transparency, responsibility, confidentiality and common sense.

3 METHOD

The present paper adopts a qualitative approach since it studies a phenomenon involving human beings and their social relations, with no interest to enumerate and measure the events analyzed or employ statistical analysis (GODOY, 1995). Due to the lack of previous studies about the use of SNS within the workplace, we performed an exploratory case-based study. The case study method is considered appropriate to study emergent practices, factors or situations (MEREDITH, 1998) and it is considered exploratory because the preliminary investigations are intended to generate ideas and hypotheses for rigorous empirical testing at a later stage (SCAPENS, 1990).

In the first round of interviews, we collected data from six interviews with managers of different companies. We chose to interview people involved with the human resource department in an attempt to extract the company's position about the use of SNS by employees. Participants were asked to describe their experiences and the company policy in relation to SNS use within the workplace. These in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face lasting 40-60 minutes, digitally recorded and transcribed. We develop a semi-structured questionnaire based on the literature review and the interviews were conducted in Portuguese in December 2011. These open-ended questions were designed to allow participants to discuss any aspects related to their personal experience, professional attitude or explanations for employees' behavior.

To increase the reliability of these interviews, we conducted a second round of interviews with different people from the same companies. Lewis and Ritchie (2003) state that reliability in qualitative studies can be achieved by internal checks on the quality of the data and interpretations and by providing accurate information about the research process. Thus, in August 2012 we interviewed employees from different work positions to confirm the first analysis and add new findings. This triangulation method is a means of testing out arguments from different angles. Being open to different ways of seeing, constructing meanings and acknowledging divergence enables researchers to pursue interpretations further and deepen understanding to portray a valid picture (SIMONS, 2009).

The second round of interviews was conducted via telephone or Internet calls, in Portuguese, lasting 20-40 minutes, also digitally recorded and transcribed. These interviews lasted less time because the questions were more specific, based on previous findings.

According to Simons (2009), as the researcher goes from interview to interview and observes more situations in the field, he or she can change the questions, decide if there are further issues to investigate or refine the interpretative asides. At the end of the interview, we asked the respondents whether they agreed with the framework proposed in this paper.

Data analysis was performed qualitatively, in which procedures adopted by the companies were compared with the literature. Yin (2005) states that the construction of an explanation should be the result of an iterative process in which the final result may not have been stated from the beginning. Consequently, the interpretation of the previous theory can be revised to reach the appropriate explanation. As requested by the interviewees, the names of the companies have been kept anonymous. Companies A, B, C, D, E and F represent the study population. To complement the results, we used secondary data from newspapers, magazines and corporate websites. This information is used to enhance the proposed framework, but the references are not described to maintain the confidentiality of the companies.

3.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT

As previously stated, we performed twelve interviews in six companies from different industries. We conducted case studies in two consulting firms and one in each industry, as follows: human resource service provision, retailing, general trading company¹ and pay-tv. The companies vary in their size from 80 to 8,000 employees in Brazil and company F counts on 10,000 outsourced employees, including call center attendants, sellers and technicians. Company D is the only domestic corporation, while the others are multinational companies of foreign origin. In the first round of interviews, we talked with people who had experience with SNS and were able to define the company position about its use within the workplace. In the second round of interviews, we talked to employees who have worked for the organization for more than one year, so that they could confirm the policy on SNS use. Table 1 presents some general characteristics.

¹ General trading company (*sogo shosha* in Japanese) is a term designating a unique Japanese business entity that trades a wide range of products. In addition to trading, they have historically acted as investment banks and private equities. *Sogo shosha* may be better described as a business philosophy based on three dimensions: large number of commodities, geographical spread and economic power (Kunio, 1982).

Table 1 - Presentation of the companies

Company	Industry	Number of employees	1 st round of interview	2 nd round of interview
A	HR Service Provider	World: 8,000 Brazil: 240	Managing Director	Consultant (since 2006)
B	Consulting	World: 23,600 Brazil: 8,000	Talent & Organization Manager	Senior Manager (since 2000)
C	Consulting	World: 430,000 Brazil: 17,400	Change Management Consultant	Consultant (since 2008)
D	Retail	Brazil: 15,000	HR Specialist	Consultant Service Provider (since 2011)
E	General Trading Company	World: 5,000 Brazil: 80	HR Specialist	Business Analyst (since 2007)
F	Pay-tv via Satellite	World: 23,000 Brazil: 2,000	Social Network Site Supervisor	Intern (since 2011)

The first round of interviews at company A was conducted with the managing director, holding the highest management position in Brazil. Company B was represented by an experienced project manager who had already worked for the company's HR department. The consultant from company C served the corporation for five years and was recently hired by company D as a HR specialist – same position of company E's respondent. Company F is the only one that has a specific department for SNS and we managed to interview its supervisor.

In the second round of interviews, companies A and C were represented by functional consultants, who demonstrated how they utilize SNS in their daily work. As a senior manager, the employee of company B was able to show how internal SNS can help her in decision making. Since she had provided consulting services at company D for more than 15 months, we also asked her to talk about the practices adopted by this company. We interviewed a business analyst from company E and an intern from company F, who had been working there for exactly one year.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To facilitate understanding of the results, we present the outcomes in topics, reproduce excerpts from interviews, establish the proper relationship with the literature and discuss the consequences of each decision.

4.1 SNS USE WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

As the aim of this paper is to classify the companies according to the use made of SNS, we present quotes from both rounds of interviews to increase the explanatory power of our results (PRATT, 2009). At the end of each quote, we indicate whether the respondent is from the first or second round of interviews. Besides the excerpts from interviews, Table 2 also represents symbolically how the studied companies use SNS within the workplace. We

decided to develop this framework to better visualize the situation of each company in respect to access to external SNS, development of internal SNS and existence of a specific policy for SNS use. The symbols “O” and “X” indicate the extreme cases where companies permit or do not allow free access to external SNS, have or do not have internal SNS and have or do not have a specific policy for SNS. The symbol “Δ” represents intermediate cases.

Table 2 - SNS use within the companies

	External SNS	Internal SNS	Specific Policy for SNS
A	<i>In Brazil, we block employees' access to Facebook. Our consultants are paid by the hour, so they have to be aware that customers can notice on Facebook that they are not working while posting contents (Interviewee A1).</i> X	<i>We created internal tools but these projects failed because employees continued using Facebook or Orkut. Eventually, a large corporation with 50 or 60 thousand employees could achieve success (Interviewee A1).</i> X	<i>Upon being hired, we receive an internal policy checklist about the correct use of Internet. This checklist contains restrictions on SNS such as Orkut and Facebook (Interviewee A2).</i> Δ
B	<i>Blocking access would make us unable to respond to some clients' requests. The company also uses SNS to be in evidence (Interviewee B2).</i> O	<i>Our company encourages the use of internal tools. We were asked to avoid the use of external tools when addressing issues related to work (Interviewee B1).</i> O	<i>There are global and local policies on ethics and information security. The training is part of employees' evaluation (Interviewee B2).</i> Δ
C	<i>We have free access. I usually consult forums where I can find topics about work-related problems and check what has been discussed about it (Interviewee C2).</i> O	<i>Internal SNS are used for knowledge exchange. There are communities divided by topics: professional, technical, project management, certifications, etc. It consists of online spaces for forums, blogs and document archiving. (Interviewee C2).</i> O	<i>Every employee must annually be certified about the general internal policy. We get an electronic address to access and answer a questionnaire to commit that we will follow the rules (Interviewee C1).</i> Δ
D	<i>If you visit a website for the first time, the address and the employee's name is recorded (Interviewee D2).</i> X	<i>We have informational portals without interaction among users, just passive reading of information (Interviewee D2).</i> X	<i>There is an internal policy available in the intranet banning the use of Internet during working hours (Interviewee D1).</i> Δ
E	<i>Internet use should be strictly professional. However, we know that employees are accessing SNS during working hours. The company is aware of this situation, but so far has not taken any harsher action (Interviewee E1).</i> O	<i>The internal SNS is already working. In the system, you can fill out a profile, upload pictures, join discussion forums, download books and take online courses (Interviewee E2).</i> O	<i>The day I was hired, I signed an agreement saying that Internet use is only for business purposes, excluding personal use (Interviewee E2).</i> Δ
F	<i>The financial department, for example, doesn't need to access SNS. Someone that checks his/her Facebook many times along the day is losing productive time (Interviewee F1).</i> Δ	<i>I usually receive information broadcast through email (Interviewee F2).</i> X	<i>I received internal training on the use of SNS, which mentioned Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. I have access to much confidential information, so I have to be aware of the risks of using SNS (Interviewee F2).</i> O

Regarding external SNS, company A denies access within the company, but affirms that they cannot control the access while the consultants are allocated in customers' premises. This situation is in accordance with the company position that 'SNS use is not forbidden but it is not stimulated'. Companies B and C permit free access to SNS, without restrictions to any website. In fact, people from the second round of interviews stressed the importance of having access to SNS to access information and achieve better results in their work. Company D completely denies access to Internet and even scans professional e-mails, as can be seen in the first round of interviews:

According to the company's policy, Internet should be used only on work-related activities, which means that any blog, personal e-mail or Social Network Site can be accessed through the company's Internet network.

Although the IT Policy of company E states that employees are not allowed to access private e-mails or SNS during working time, there is no control in the network and everyone in practice has free access to websites. Company F permits access depending on job role and department. Thus, marketing and communication departments have free access while IT and finance departments have restrictions, for example. According to its supervisor, departments that demand focus to perform their work cannot be distracted during working time (see Table 2).

This situation was previously reported by Boyd & Ellison (2008) and Skeels & Grudin (2009), who affirmed that some companies consider the use of SNS as a waste of productive time and block access to such websites. In the first round of interviews, the person from company A stated that posts on SNS can be considered as evidence of wasted time, a source of bad performance or justification not to approve overtime. The people from companies A and D in the second round of interviews mentioned another reason to restrict access to SNS. According to them, such websites usually contain files of images, audios and videos – which bring the need for investments in technological infrastructure, since they consume network bandwidth.

In the literature review, we demonstrated how internal SNS can bring advantages for organizations, but companies A, D and F do not intend to implement an internal SNS at the moment. According to company A's director, these internal tools are more efficient in bigger companies, where the number of employees would attract the interest of the workforce (see Table 2). This is in accordance with Lin & Lu (2011), who affirmed that the number of connections and perceived complementarity reinforce SNS usefulness. In the second round of interviews, the respondent from company D cited the existence of internal portals to disclose

official information, which is not considered as a SNS (see table 2). Company F also has no plans for internal SNS, although it does have a project to be implemented by the outsourced company related to customer service.

Companies B and C are already using several internal tools regarding interaction between employees. The exchange of knowledge within a safe environment is a source of competitive advantage for these companies, as explained by company C's consultant:

We have many internal tools with SNS characteristics. We have tools for instant message exchange, knowledge management, discussion forum and Social Network Sites to interact with coworkers worldwide.

In the second round of interviews, the senior manager of company B confirmed the importance of such tools to exchange knowledge, increase visibility and compose working teams. The consultant of company C addressed its importance in global projects, as it involves people from different countries and time zones. According to her, it is important to keep all the information up-to-date within the system so that new members from any part of the world can become part of the team and have access to the content that has been generated so far and quickly contribute to the project.

According to the responses in the first round of interviews, company E was starting to implement a knowledge management tool with SNS characteristics. Eight months later, during the second round of interviews, the business analyst confirmed that this tool was already implemented. She explained that besides the discussion forums, it was possible to download books and take online courses (see Table 2). Sherif et al. (2006) showed how these internal systems can play an important role in the accumulation of social capital by creating dense and highly connected networks, whose members trust each other and feel obliged to carry out the responsibilities conferred on them by the network with which they are associated.

Questioned about a specific policy for SNS, the respondents from companies A, B, C, D and E affirmed that SNS use is encompassed on their internal policy on IT, ethics or confidentiality. In the second round of interviews, the people from companies A and E explained that upon hiring, employees receive an internal policy checklist about the correct use of the Internet, which includes restrictions on SNS use. In turn, companies B and C give periodic training about the internal policy as part of the employees' individual appraisal. In addition to questions addressing the use of SNS, these policies involve issues of sharing confidential data, use of the company's and customers' name, as well as downloading of software and digital files (videos, music). Company F is the only one to have a specific policy

for SNS, which involves preservation of the company's image, information confidentiality, building security and personal risks, as can be seen from the SNS supervisor's words:

We have just implemented the policy on SNS with the objective to educate employees on how to use SNS properly. It involves the preservation of the company's and shareholders' image, personal risks, gossiping and information confidentiality. The development of this policy involved question of human resources, law, ethics, information security, access to the building, etc.

The intern of company F has no access to external SNS, but he confirmed that he was trained. According to him, it is important that employees know how to behave in such environments, because anyone can have access to SNS through smartphones or even after work when they get home.

About SNS use in the future, the respondents believe that access will be allowed gradually, as people learn how to behave on SNS. Company D, which has no access to websites, also believes that this situation will change gradually, because managers or departments will increasingly need to access such information to perform their work. DiMicco et al. (2008) predicted that the next generation of employees will use SNS as their dominant communication means and companies need to bridge generational gaps and boundaries to support this method of communication between employees. Besides that, employees are increasingly purchasing smartphones with Internet access, which allows them to use SNS without control of the company.

4.2 REASONS FOR USING SNS

In addition to developing a framework, this study seeks to explain how companies use SNS to achieve their strategic corporate objectives. Accordingly, Table 3 presents excerpts from the first and second rounds of interviews to explain the companies' position about the reasons for using SNS, increase of social capital and concerns about privacy and disclosure.

Table 3 - Considerations about the use of SNS within the companies

	Reasons for using SNS	Social Capital	Privacy & Disclosure
A	<i>I found through the pictures posted on Facebook that one of my employees had traveled to New York to study English. This person was about to be fired, but because of the picture I decided to transfer her to another department (Interviewee A1).</i>	<i>I've added a coworker from Manila on Facebook and I could see his pictures, posts, friends (Interviewee A2).</i>	<i>Although we do not have a policy about the correct use of SNS, common sense ends up modeling the use of such websites (Interviewee A2).</i>
B	<i>Networking is extremely important in a consulting firm. When starting a new project, you access SNS to know the customer; the segment; the people that you will contact (Interviewee B2).</i>	<i>Some people add contacts on Facebook as soon as they discover the colleague's name (Interviewee B1).</i>	<i>SNS can also cause problems, because people may disclose confidential information or have atypical attitudes that may discredit them (Interviewee B2).</i>
C	<i>Liking the company's page on</i>	<i>I had an experience with a coworker</i>	<i>I care about pictures and posts on</i>

	<i>Facebook allows us to have access to new information. Employees can comment and discuss about the company through SNS (Interviewee C2).</i>	<i>who works in Rio de Janeiro. I used to make comments on her posts because we were from the same area. When I went to Rio de Janeiro for a project, this girl invited me for lunch (Interviewee C1).</i>	<i>Facebook. You end up mixing people who are very close with those you relate professionally (Interviewee C2).</i>
D	<i>SNS are blocked for two reasons: concern about time spent on these websites; and investments in equipment to provide Internet access (Interviewee D2).</i>	<i>Even not allowing access to SNS during working hours, companies like their employees to become part of a network. Nowadays, everyone has access to SNS from home or smartphones (Interviewee D2).</i>	<i>Nowadays, I read more than I write and I think twice before publishing something (Interviewee D1).</i>
E	<i>SNS allow us to have fast access to information and overcome geographical barriers (Interviewee E1).</i>	<i>My coworkers are on my Facebook. It is an opportunity to know the person better and discover common interests. (Interviewee E2).</i>	<i>For privacy reasons, I prefer not to connect with people who I have not met personally (Interviewee E2).</i>
F	<i>Some departments need access to SNS to perform their work, for example, to keep track of what consumers are saying about the company (Interviewee F2).</i>	<i>SNS are great to learn more about people, their life, interests (Interviewee F2).</i>	<i>We don't want people to stop writing; we just want them to be careful about what to write. (Interviewee F1).</i>

Managers believe that employees are using external SNS during working time for personal reasons, especially for entertainment and to complement offline relationships. This is one the reasons why company D completely restricts access to SNS during working hours. In this sense, Subrahmanyam et al. (2008) and Lin & Lu (2011) also showed that the primary use of SNS was related to people from offline lives, besides enjoyment. In this situation, we noticed that companies B, C and F stimulate the personal use of external SNS by employees, probably to encourage them to promote the corporate brand or to disclose products, services and news. The supervisor of company F showed how the personal use of SNS is stimulated within the corporation:

The use of SNS is stimulated and even the vice-president has accounts in many websites. He is a SNS enthusiast, considers himself a 'twitterer', and has a blog about soccer. He actively uses Twitter and Facebook and has discovered some SNS that have not even arrived in Brazil.

Respondents from some companies mentioned career opportunity as one of the reasons to use SNS, including strategic management of connections and self-promotion on LinkedIn, which is in accordance with the study of DiMicco et al. (2008). The consultant of company C uses open discussion forums to find what has been discussed by people from other companies about problems of the system. Besides that, the studied companies are using external SNS for recruitment selection and disclosure of official information. Company B developed an automatic online tool that analyzes the consultants' network on LinkedIn and indicates which connection has the skills to be part of workforce. Although the search for human resources through SNS is not an official procedure, companies reported that it is common to check the

candidate's profile to search for professional or personal information. Company E reported a case where a candidate was disqualified because of the content of his posts, as we can see below, according to the HR specialist:

We do not use SNS as a decisive factor in hiring, but we take a look on the candidate's profile to know a little more about the person. There was a recent case in which a department manager noted on the candidate's profile that he was complaining about work and this was one of the factors not to hire him.

The use of SNS for marketing campaigns or recruitment and selection has been addressed in recent studies. As a new phenomenon, Brazilian managers consider online marketing as a low investment activity with significant benefits (BARCELLOS, 2011), while human resources managers consider SNS as a complement to other recruitment methods that facilitates and accelerates the process (GOMES, 2011). Company A seems to utilize information from external SNS to know more about its workforce, by predicting employees' dissatisfaction, complaints or needs. Its director uses information that is published on SNS to help him on managerial decisions, as can be seen below:

The constant updating of a CV on LinkedIn can be a signal that an employee is dissatisfied with the company and looking for another job. However, if an employee is improving his qualifications and updating his LinkedIn profile, this can help him or her in a promotion decision.

Although this initiative may involve concerns about privacy, the utilization of information published on SNS is in accordance with the findings of DiMicco et al. (2008), which showed that SNS can provide a good source of up-to-date, relevant and dynamic information to be used to understand the workforce.

4.3 SNS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

As shown in Table 3, companies reported that some employees managed to be connected just because of SNS functionalities, which predicts bridging social capital. These functionalities includes forums for discussion and online communities, where employees can discuss the resolution of a problem related to work or recognize people with common interests like videogames, sports or handicrafts, for example. Additionally, coworkers located in different offices can overcome geographical barriers and become friends due to the first contact provided by SNS (ELLISON et al., 2007; STEINFELD et al., 2008; ELLISON et al., 2011).

Within the limits of the company, Skeels & Grudin (2009) reported tensions arising from crossing hierarchy, but company F thinks that SNS can provide proximity between employees from different positions. The manager stressed that in the past only a few people could interact with the vice-president, while nowadays anyone who has an account can

discuss any matter of common interest, even soccer. Thus, SNS can reduce the distance between bosses and subordinates and facilitate the flow of information:

Facebook really helped to shorten distances. The whole basis of analysts and trainees who could not have a meeting with our vice-president can now discuss soccer or a movie, for example. Now employees can talk freely with that person who would otherwise be on a pedestal, in an ivory tower.

Although some companies in the sample do not use SNS to reach bonding social capital, it seems to be an important tool to complement the bond formed among coworkers. Managers affirmed that coworkers usually become close friends due to daily living and use SNS to complement this relationship by sharing pictures, comments and opinions – regardless of access during working hours. Managers cited the benefits that are inherent from this closer relationship, like proximity between coworkers, integration and feeling of belonging (STEINFELD et al., 2009). Company A believes that SNS are important to the formation of bonding social capital and presents its advantages:

The company takes advantage of the use of SNS because employees create a bond that surpasses the work environment. It is common to see employees traveling together over the weekend and publishing photos or updating status on SNS. There is a synergy between coworkers that stimulates a feeling of belonging to the group.

In the second round of interviews, employees from companies A, D and E confirmed that they use external SNS to know their colleagues better (table 3). According to them, it is an opportunity to find out personal information and common interests that may bring proximity among them. On the other hand, the increase of social capital can also bring disadvantages, such as overexposure, privacy issues, possibility of knowing bad things about friends and risk of selecting incorrect information. As predicted by Coleman (1988), a given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others.

4.4 PRIVACY & DISCLOSURE

We could observe concerns about privacy and disclosure many times during the interviews with managers, alerting about the challenge to handling personal and professional life through SNS. This problem was presented by Gross & Acquisti (2005) and McClard & Anderson (2008), according to whom people usually share and interact differently according to the circle of connections. The business analyst from company E refused a request of friendship on Facebook because she wanted to keep a barrier between the information disclosed to personal and professional friends.

In the organizational context, this situation becomes more complicated as friendship on SNS involves clients, suppliers and even competitors. Managers want their employees to

evaluate the consequences of posting inappropriate content, especially with those involving the company's name. The consultant from company D found herself in a situation where she had already worked for two competitor firms and become friends with people from both corporations. She explained that in this situation, you have to be aware of what to post, because you can accidentally disclose some confidential information. Besides this, she avoids publications (pictures, comments or complaints) involving the companies' names to prevent online discussions among the connection.

Company A experienced an embarrassing situation in which the director received a call from a customer reporting inappropriate behavior on SNS by a consultant:

I had to ask my consultant to remove the content from his Facebook because everyone was making fun of him. Unfortunately, we still live in a world that respect is gained not only by knowledge, but by how you live. There is no way to disassociate both. Everyone has the right to lead life the way they want to, but from the moment that you use a social tool involving people from work, you need to submit yourself to certain conditions.

In the second round of interviews, the consultant confirmed that employees are gradually shaping their behavior on SNS as people go through these kinds of situations. As an alternative to controlling the information that is shared, some companies have suggested that employees manage their lists of contacts to control who can have access to such information or even have two different profiles. However, at the same time, they do not want to censor their employees, as we can see from the company F supervisor in Table 3.

The specialist from company D reported her personal experience about how to behave on SNS regarding privacy and disclosure. Nosko et al. (2010) found that age was an important factor in determining disclosure behavior and we noticed that the specialist decreased the amount of information as she grew hierarchically, as if she realized the risks and consequences that each post could bring. Also, she showed some concerns about what people write about her, exactly what Tong et al. (2008) call novelty on SNS, that such systems contain information provided not only by the creator, but by the creator's friends:

I used to be more active in SNS but as I started to grow hierarchically, I stopped using them because I'm mixing family, friends and people I've worked with or I'm still working with. I also worry about what people post about me because it is my image that is there.

Company F has created a policy to avoid situations such as putting a coworker in an embarrassing situation by posting inappropriate content or photos from the office that may accidentally show confidential documents or the placement of security cameras. The creation of a specific policy for SNS is in accordance with the Li (2010), who states that every

company needs to develop and put in place a policy for SNS to create structure, process and discipline around openness.

5 CLASSIFICATION FRAMEWORK AND IMPLICATIONS

Our objective here is to classify Brazilian companies by relating SNS use in the workplace with the corporate strategic objective. To meet such objective, we analyzed six companies from different industries according to the main theoretical approaches. Next, we present some aspects that can be highlighted as conclusions.

Taking into consideration how each company utilizes external SNS, develops internal SNS and adopts specific policy for its use, we propose a framework that classifies the studied companies into three groups, in accordance with their management purpose. Figure 1 shows where the companies were classified, after which we discuss how the variables can influence the achievement of corporate strategic objectives.

	External SNS	Internal SNS	Specific Policy for SNS	
B	O	O	Δ	Knowledge Creation
C	O	O	Δ	
E	O	O	Δ	
F	Δ	X	O	Corporate Branding
A	X	X	Δ	Administrative Control
D	X	X	Δ	

Figure 1 - Classification of companies according to corporate strategic objective

Companies B, C and E were classified in the first group, where the creation of knowledge is considered as a core competence. In these companies, external and internal SNS are important to the creation and sharing of intellectual capital, in which they can benefit from the knowledge and social capital that are raised through these tools (NAHAPIET; GHOSHAL, 1998; SHERIF et al., 2006). Companies B and C allow free access to any website and have developed many internal tools to enhance interaction between employees. Company E also permits free access to any website – although Internet use for personal matters is officially prohibited. This company was developing an internal tool for knowledge management during the first round of interviews and had already implemented it in August 2012.

These companies are using SNS because of the functional advantages, like the ease of communication, the ease to find contacts and access to information generated by discussion.

Thus, employees can gain access to experts, discuss the resolution of a problem, or even find people with the same interest independently of the place of work, department, position or organization. The use of internal and external SNS enables the creation, maintenance and strengthening of weak ties among colleagues (SKEELS; GRUDIN, 2009) and we could observe the formation of bridging social capital by the transposition of geographical and hierarchical barriers. SNS can also complement the formation of offline bonding social capital when used as a tool to interact with close friends from the same company. Despite the benefits from the use of SNS, we could observe employees with some privacy concerns trying to keep a barrier between personal and professional contacts. A specific policy may help them to protect personal integrity, preserve confidential information and maintain the company's reputation (MCAFEE, 2009).

In the second round of interviews, the respondents from companies B, C and E agreed with the proposed classification. The consultant of company C observed that they also use open SNS to promote the brand to consumers. According to her, company C disseminates their work with customers, society, research agencies and public institutions through external SNS. Although company E has endeavored to manage internal knowledge, the analyst affirmed that few employees were using the internal SNS in Brazil. According to her, the low number of employees may explain the lack of interest among coworkers in the country (LIN; LU, 2011), but she believes that the system is better used in the company's headquarters.

Online reports and articles in magazines demonstrate other benefits that companies from this group achieve by using SNS. For companies B and C, the integration among consultants around the world stimulates innovation and reduces costs for technical support. Speed of sharing and volume of collaboration are also treated as differentials.

Company F was classified in the Corporate Branding group for having a specific department for SNS to improve customer relationship and optimize marketing campaigns. This department has eight employees and counts on consulting firms that search for relevant comments and trends on the Internet. This initiative was shown by Barcellos (2011), where companies were increasingly interacting with their customers through regular monitoring of SNS. Company F is more interested in enriching the corporate image with customers than developing an internal tool to enhance knowledge creation. In this sense, the access to external SNS is allowed just in the departments directly related to customer relationship. Also, the creation of a specific policy for SNS is aligned with the corporate objective, as they first educate their employees on how to behave on SNS and then start to interact with

customers. Such policy instructs employees about the personal and corporate benefits arising from social networks and also the associated risks, like inappropriate content, personal safety, building security, data confidentiality or legal penalties (LI, 2010).

Company F stimulates the use of SNS to cause an impact on marketing campaigns. The presence of the vice-president on SNS functions as an incentive for all employees to follow the example and become active in disclosing the company's name. Interaction between the workforce and their connections may promote discussions about products, services or news and put the company's brand in evidence. This online interaction increases bridging social capital within the company, as it generates proximity between executives and common employees. Company F also creates corporate profiles on SNS to reach consumers by answering complaints or listening to their opinion to develop new services. Concerns about privacy and disclosure are considered in the specific SNS policy.

Articles published by magazines and newspapers demonstrate the benefits achieved by company F after starting to interact with consumers. The speed of communication and the ability to provide accurate and reliable information through SNS enabled the company to establish a constant and continuous relationship and a consequent approximation with clients.

Companies A and D were classified in the Administrative Control group, in which controlling employees' behavior seems to be more important than benefits arising from SNS use. Company D presents the extreme case, with complete restriction on Internet. However, this tight control has brought problems, as even the HR specialist reported difficulties to access online material to set up training content, or search for new human resources. Despite the restriction to SNS during working hours, the managing director of company A uses external SNS to connect with employees and utilizes posted information to help him in management decisions, which demonstrates the controlling nature of the company.

During the field research, we found that information posted on SNS can influence management decisions. Company A uses SNS to follow employees' behavior, since their posts may be seen as evidence of time waste or the cause of poor performance. At the same time, companies can benefit when employees use SNS because they can construct new connections or complement offline relationships. SNS can help coworkers to find out personal information through profiles, comments and opinions, increasing the opportunity to bring them together and reinforce their social capital. Concerns on privacy were also found in these companies and policy for SNS would be useful to educate employees on how to behave with

work-related connections, as they can interact with those people after working hours or through smartphones.

This classification was also confirmed during the second round of interviews. Company A is more reactive and tries to control employees' behavior instead of educating them proactively. Company D justified its controlling nature due to confidentiality of information, in which it is important to protect data from competitors and suppliers. We did not find secondary data reporting the use of SNS by companies A and D. For being a retailer, we expected company D to have greater proximity with consumers through SNS, but the official website does not mention any SNS – all contacts are made by phone or email. This lack of interaction and absence in the news may be evidence of the low utilization of SNS by both companies, supporting their controlling nature.

Table 4 presents the proposed categories, their main characteristics and quotes to illustrate our points (PRATT, 2009). Freitas & Bandeira-de-Mello (2012) state that case variation is important for analyzing the studied phenomenon, as it increases the explanatory power of the results. Thus, we included excerpts from interviews to demonstrate the classification proposed by our research for each company.

Table 4 - Proposed classification and proof quotes

Classification	Main Characteristics	Quotes
Knowledge Creation	Value the social and intellectual capital generated through online discussion.	<i>These tools allow access to information on people worldwide, which facilitates the exchange of knowledge with anyone in the world. You can easily talk with a partner or a customer from other cities or countries (Interviewee B1).</i> <i>SNS can be used for knowledge management. In our company, we have discussion forums where we can attach documents, ask questions about certain subjects, reach people with expertise, exchange documents (Interviewee C1).</i> <i>In global projects, all the documentation is posted in online communities. There is stimulus for new discoveries to be posted there. If someone has to leave the project, or new members are included, they are able to access and follow all the content that has been generated so far (Interviewee C2).</i>
Corporate Branding	Strengthen the corporate image with customers	<i>I work with a consulting firm that shows us network trending - what people are saying, commenting, complaining (Interviewee F1).</i> <i>Some departments need access to SNS to monitor what consumers are saying about the company. I've become more aware about my posts' content after I started working in this company (Interviewee F2).</i>
Administrative Control	Concerns about information confidentiality, productivity and procrastination	<i>The constant updating of a CV on LinkedIn can be a signal that an employee is dissatisfied with the company and looking for another job. However, if an employee is improving his qualifications and updating his LinkedIn profile, this can help him or her in a promotion decision (Interviewee A1).</i> <i>This tight control is related to competition, information of products, suppliers, prices - this type of business requires the information to be kept confidential (Interviewee D2).</i>

Beyond the classification, we highlight other general conclusions. First, the interviewees reported that employees are also using external SNS for entertainment reasons, but it is important to note that these activities can be considered as a break from work or a time for relaxation. Internal SNS are mainly used to exchange knowledge and increase visibility through the connection with strategic people and disclosure of news, questions and professional-related experiences. External SNS are important to reach expertise from people outside the company. Most companies reported the use of internal and external SNS for selection and recruitment through the consultation of candidates' profiles or to search for new talent.

As discussed above, the formation of bridging and bonding social capital can be an organization asset, resulting from the interaction among coworkers and people outside the organization. Thus, some respondents reported how the creation of connected networks may help employees to reach out to experts and solve problems and also increase trust and responsibility. At the same time, the increase of social capital can allow employees to select incorrect information or learn bad things about each other.

Concerns about privacy and overexposure were reported several times during the interviews, which can be a reflection of the sociability and active participation of Brazilian users on SNS. In the organizational context, the network of connections extends beyond people from family and personal friends, reaching coworkers, bosses, customers, suppliers and even competitors. Therefore, we could observe some employees behaving inappropriately in light of the risks associated with the misuse of the tool. The appropriate use of SNS can include the management of contacts in groups by controlling who can have access to certain content; the creation of different profiles for each circle of contacts; or simply discretion regarding the content of publications. Based on the interviews, we noted that Brazilian employees still are not aware about the risks and potentialities of SNS. Although the use of SNS is prohibited in some organizations, having a policy on its use would be useful for every company, since it educates employees on how to properly behave in such environments.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study, some difficulties may have resulted in limitations that should be mentioned. First, the case study method has some limitations inherent to its nature. The use of personal interviews as an information source has the bias of the interviewee and the researcher. This bias includes that managers may not disclose some information so as not to compromise the company's interest or the investigator may not understand the answers well,

which can cause distortion in the analysis. To counterbalance this limitation, we performed a second round of interviews to confirm the working classification and add new findings. The use of different sources of information can help to improve the clarity and precision of a research finding (LEWIS; RITCHIE, 2003).

This exploratory study has developed a framework to classify companies according to their SNS use in the workplace. According to Donmoyer (1990), case study research can be used to expand and enrich the repertoire of constructions available to practitioners and others. Thus, the results presented in this study can be used as hypotheses to be tested in further studies (SCAPENS, 1990; LEWIS; RITCHIE, 2003). The conduction of a quantitative study with a representative sample could reach the correct degree of generalization.

Finally, the present study brings empirical contribution to the literature due to the lack of previous research about the utilization of SNS in the organizational context, especially those involving Brazilian companies.

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