

The Hype and Reality of Social Media Use for Work Collaboration and Team Communication

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Abstract

This article describes the growing adoption of enterprise social networking platforms by organizations in an attempt to foster better team communication and collaboration. To examine current views of these social networking tools, survey results from 227 business professionals are presented that address three areas: frequency of use of social networking for team communication compared to other communication channels, perceived effectiveness of social networking tools for team communication compared to other communication channels, and attitudes toward social networking for team communication. Generally, the results show that traditional communication channels are used more frequently and considered more effective for team communication. However, the results also indicate that Gen X and Gen Y business professionals are quite likely to consider that social networking tools will be the primary tools for team communication in the future. The article concludes with recommendations for how business communication scholars can advance, define, and set apart the field by focusing on business communication via enterprise social networking platforms.

Keywords

social networking, social media, social business, team communication, team collaboration, enterprise social networking platforms

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Social media platforms such as Facebook and MySpace have dramatically altered how people communicate with one another. Once viewed as tools for young people, social networking sites are now mainstream tools of communication for individuals in all age groups. As of February 2012 in the United States, nearly all 18- to 29-year-olds (86%) used these sites, most 30- to 49-year-olds (72%) did so, and half of 50- to 64-year-olds did so (Brenner, 2012). In fact, within the past few years, social networking sites have overtaken e-mail as the primary means of online communication. Comscore, the leading organization in Internet traffic measurement, reported that communication via social networking exceeded that of e-mail for the first time in 2009 (Hinchcliffe & Kim, 2012).

In the workplace, however, e-mail remains the most popular form of interpersonal business communication. Yet many experts in the computer industry foresee social networking overtaking e-mail as the primary form of business communication within the next decade. In some companies, this shift will likely occur within a few years. One of the most well-respected IT consulting services, Gartner, forecasts that social networking will overtake e-mail in 20% of companies by 2014. Furthermore, a variety of experts forecast that social networking will supplant e-mail as the dominant form of workplace communication within a decade. These experts foresee the majority of team communication via social networking platforms occurring on enterprise social networking platforms, which are designed specifically for organizational use and which most often reside on corporate intranets (Austin, 2011; Hinchcliffe & Kim, 2012).

These potential changes in team communication may dramatically affect the business communication field. Communication with social media tools requires business professionals to adopt a new set of tools, such as blogs, wikis, and other collaborative tools, to accomplish team goals. To use these new tools will require new skills and attitudes. Many experts in enterprise social networking platforms believe that most business professionals will need to significantly alter how they share information and with whom they share it. In short, the form, content, and audiences of business communications via social media tools may differ in many ways from more traditional communication channels such as in-person team meetings and e-mail messages (Tapscott & Williams, 2008, 2010).

In this article, we present research about the use of social networking for team communication in the workplace. We examine its frequency of use and perceived effectiveness for team communication. We also present findings related to other channels of communication as points of comparison. Then, we display our findings about business professionals' attitudes about social networking for team communication. We conclude with our ideas for advancing and defining the business communication field by focusing on workplace communication via social networking.

Background

In this section, we briefly review the adoption of public social networking platforms, focus on social networking platforms in business communication literature, discuss the emergence of enterprise social networking platforms, and provide a rationale for examining social networking for team communication.

Technology Adoption and the Adoption of Public Social Networking Platforms

In nearly all theories of technology adoption, users are grouped by their propensities to adopt the new technology. One of the classic theories of adoption is Rogers' (1962) work *Diffusion of Innovations*. He grouped adopters of new technologies into the following five groups: innovators (the first 2.5% of users), early adopters (the next 13.5%), the early majority (the next 34%), the late majority (the next 34%), and laggards (the final 16%). Users of new technologies choose to adopt after various decision-making stages, including awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. Certain technologies ultimately reach a point of critical mass whereby the number of users and the momentum of adoption drive the technology to mass, even universal, adoption. Critical mass often occurs in the early majority stage (once between 15% and 50% of a given population are users) as use of the technology becomes increasingly visible and as influential individuals, often innovators and early adopters, lead adoption efforts.

The adoption of public social networking platforms (SNPs), such as Facebook, MySpace, and Google Spaces, has gone through these adoption stages in roughly 15 to 20 years. Public SNPs featuring user profiles emerged in the late 1990s with sites such as SixDegrees.com. By 2003, the innovators had already firmly adopted these platforms (see Figure 1). By 2005, the early adopters had begun using SNPs, and successful public SNPs such as MySpace, LinkedIn, and Facebook were becoming enormously successful. From roughly 2005 to 2009, the early majority of adopters pushed public SNPs to critical mass. From roughly 2009 until the present, the late majority of adopters have begun using SNPs. Currently, those adults adopting public SNPs are in the laggard group, the final 16% to adopt (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Brenner, 2012).

Focus on Social Media in Business Communication Research

Many business communication researchers and instructors have recognized the growing role of online social networking for work purposes (Cardon, 2009; Dyrud, 2012; Knight, 2012; Norris, 2007). As adoption of public SNPs entered the late majority stage (once over 50% of a given population are users), dozens of business communication scholars began publishing about public SNPs. Many of these scholars addressed how to integrate Facebook, YouTube, and other social media tools into learning activities (Cardon & Okoro, 2010; Crews & Stitt-Gohdes, 2012; Dyrud, 2011; Li, 2012; McEachern, 2011; Melton & Hicks, 2011; Meredith, 2012). In particular, many of these approaches to learning have emphasized teamwork and collaboration (Buechler, 2010; Carmichael, 2011; Clark & Stewart, 2010; Netzley & Rath, 2012). Other scholars addressed the nature of social media use for employment communications (DeKay, 2009; Genova, 2009; Roberts & Roach, 2009). Others have focused on using YouTube and online videos for various purposes (Clark & Stewart, 2007; Lehman, DuFrene, & Lehman, 2010). Yet other scholars have focused primarily on how students use social media tools (Agarwal & Mital, 2009; Clipson, Wilson, & DuFrene, 2012; Decarie,

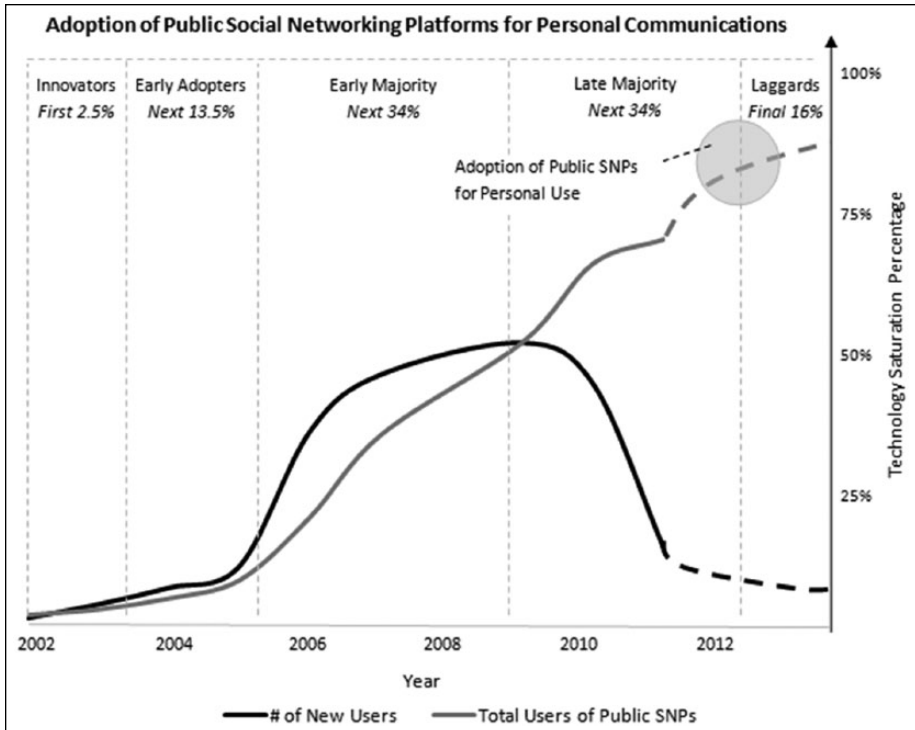


Figure 1. The adoption of public social networking platforms (SNPs).

2010; Kelm, 2011). For the most part, however, this body of work has addressed the nature of public SNPs with little or no attention to emerging forms of social networking created exclusively for professional communication within organizations.

The Emergence of Enterprise Social Networking Platforms

With the extraordinary growth in the use of public networking SNPs, business technology experts began designing social networking platforms tailored for use in the workplace. These platforms are variously referred to as *enterprise SNPs*, *Enterprise 2.0*, *social software*, or *social tools* (we use the term *enterprise SNP* throughout this article). Enterprise SNPs, like public SNPs, are built around user profiles. They contain many communication tools, including blogs, microblogs, wikis, forms, instant chat and messaging, file sharing, opinion polls, bookmarks, and RSS feeds. Generally housed on corporate intranets, these platforms can in some ways be considered Facebook-like applications for employees and other professional contacts. Yet they have been designed specifically for work collaboration and communication and prioritize the use of tools such as blogs and wikis that are used less often on most public

SNPs (Turban, Liang, & Wu, 2011; Wilson, Lin, Longstreet, & Sarker, 2011). Technically, enterprise SNPs have become mature and sophisticated tools offered by dozens of major software vendors, including IBM, Cisco, Oracle, SAP, Microsoft, and Novell (Wolfe, 2011). Compared to Web 1.0 tools such as e-mail, enterprise SNPs are typically considered more capable of facilitating effective and efficient team communication and collaboration (Turban et al., 2011).

Some visionary organizations aggressively developed and adopted enterprise SNPs as far back as a decade ago (Azua, 2010; Dahlen & Keohane, 2008). Most organizations, however, did not even consider these tools until roughly 5 years ago when well-known consulting groups and prominent business thinkers began promoting the benefits of these tools (AON Consulting, 2009; Bughin, 2008; Lazar, 2007; Levy, 2009; McAfee, 2009a, 2009b; Tapscott, 2008; Tapscott & Williams, 2008, 2010).

Information about enterprise SNPs is readily available in technology blogs, industry publications, white papers on software vendor websites, social media discussion groups, and how-to books for business practitioners. We have followed developments in enterprise SNPs extensively over the past 5 years, and we view information about enterprise SNPs as coming from two camps: social business enthusiasts and social business realists. *Social business enthusiasts* tout the relative benefits of social media compared to e-mail and other collaborative tools. They emphasize that enterprise SNPs represent a new way of communicating and collaborating that is a more interactive and bottom-up; that involves self-organizing and overcomes the deficiencies of command-and-control approaches to management and innovation; and that more effectively facilitates idea sharing, knowledge management, and crowdsourcing. These social business enthusiasts describe the benefits of social tools with little or no critical examination of the potential challenges or drawbacks of these tools (e.g., Azua, 2010; Bughin, Chui, & Miller, 2009; Carter, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Hinchcliffe & Kim, 2012; Kulhanek, 2010; McAfee, 2009a, 2009b; Shah, 2010; Wright & Zdinak, 2008).

Social business realists, on the other hand, note the many challenges and risks of social software, including the slower-than-anticipated adoption and penetration of these tools, security concerns, overreliance on these tools when richer channels of communication are needed, potential fragmentation of information as more communication channels become available, possible information overload, potential distraction from work, lack of control and clear accountability, excessive self-promotion, and threat to current management systems and structures. They are not necessarily skeptical that enterprise SNPs can facilitate more collaboration, but they do not view these platforms as dramatically transformative for organizational culture as do social business enthusiasts (AON Consulting, 2009; Arnold, 2009; Avande Consulting, 2008; DiMicco, Millen, Geyer, Dugan, Brownholtz & Muller, 2008; Gelders, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Koch, Gonzalez, & Leidner, 2011; Preston, 2010, 2012; Wright, 2009; Wright & Zdinak, 2008; Zeiller & Schauer, 2011).

Hundreds of white papers present anecdotal accounts or descriptive statistics about enterprise SNPs. Both social business enthusiasts and social business realists present data to support their cases. Social business enthusiasts—who typically have a financial

stake in the success of social software—regularly present information about the value of enterprise SNPs. For example, McKinsey & Company reported that companies that used social media for team communication achieved 24% higher revenue. Frost and Sullivan showed that companies that used social media tools for team communication achieved nearly twice as much innovation and approximately 50% more sales and profit growth than companies that did not (Hinchcliffe & Kim, 2012). Yet social business realists point to other surveys that indicate less impact. For example, in a 2011 Corporate Executive Board survey, just 12% of organizations rated social media and collaboration efforts as effective (Gelders, 2011). An October 2011 survey by *InformationWeek* showed that of organizations that have adopted enterprise SNPs, use of the tools is not extensive. Just 38% of these companies reported heavy or moderate use of wikis; for discussion forums, 30%; and for blogs, 28% (Preston, 2012).

The most detailed and documented study of enterprise SNP that we are aware of was conducted by the Forrester, one of the most well-known and reputable IT consulting firms. In this May 2011 study of 4,985 American information workers, the workforce was identified as being in an early adoption stage for enterprise SNPs. Based on the study, Forrester concluded that roughly 28% of the U.S. workforce uses enterprise SNPs for work purposes at least monthly. They identified Gen X business professionals (32-45 years old in this study) and Gen Y business professionals (18-31 years old in this study) as driving adoption. In fact, Gen X professionals accounted for more enterprise SNP use (35%) than did Gen Y professionals (30%). In this study, 51% of enterprise SNP users identified themselves as productive, whereas 43% of non-enterprise-SNP users did. As a result, Forrester suggested that enterprise SNP users were slightly more productive. On the other hand, among enterprise SNP users, just 22% reported that these tools were vital to their work. Enterprise SNP users did report that the most commonly used social tool was the wiki (Keitt, 2011).

To date, however, little or no scholarly literature exists about the relative value of enterprise SNPs compared to other communication channels. Rather, an emerging set of scholarly literature addresses the technical features of enterprise SNPs and decision-making mechanisms for IT executives in adopting them (e.g., Koch et al., 2011; Patten & Keane, 2011).

Team Communication on Enterprise Social Networking Platforms

We specifically address the nature of team communication in this study for several reasons. First, a variety of factors in recent years are driving an increasing amount of professional communication to teams rather than through hierarchical command approaches. Organizations are increasingly run under the assumption that effective teamwork and collaboration drive innovation and higher productivity. Working in teams also increases satisfaction and engagement among employees (Berry, 2006, 2011; Douglas, Martin, & Krapels, 2006; Lawler & Finegold, 2000). Second, virtual teams often outperform face-to-face teams as far as decision-making speed, decision quality, and team collaboration. However, working effectively on a virtual team requires developing some new skills, even for professionals who are effective team

members in a face-to-face environment (Berry, 2006, 2011; Markman, 2009). Organizations increasingly adopt enterprise SNPs precisely because they are technically suited to enhance teamwork and collaboration in both co-located and virtual teams. However, we are aware of no academic research that addresses the degree to which enterprise SNPs are perceived as effective tools for teamwork and collaboration by professionals.

Method

Virtually no scholarly studies about the value of social networking for team communication and collaboration exist, particularly in comparison to other communication channels. As a result, we designed a survey that included the following: (a) frequency of use of social networking for team communication in comparison to other communication channels; (b) perceived effectiveness of social networking for team communication in comparison to other communication channels; and (c) attitudes toward social networking for team communication.

For the frequency of use and perceived effectiveness items, survey respondents were asked how often and how effective the various communication tools were for communication within their work teams. We included the following traditional communication channels: e-mail, face-to-face unscheduled conversations, face-to-face scheduled meetings, calls on landline phones, and calls on mobile phones. We also included the following social networking and other emerging communication tools: document sharing/wikis, texting, instant messaging, private messages on social networks, and group messages on social networks.

For the final section of the survey, we asked survey respondents about their attitudes regarding social networking for team communication. We included six items that are representative of the most commonly stated claims of social business enthusiasts.

The survey was administered online. Our survey sample consisted of alumni from the business school of one of our institutions. We had a list of e-mail addresses from approximately 600 former business students. Ultimately, we received 227 complete, usable surveys, yielding a response rate of approximately 38%. The breakdown of current professions roughly matches the percentage of enrollments in various degrees at the selected institution. We do note that the institution has had an emphasis on general business administration degrees. Given the broad representation across age groups, we view the sample as likely representative of many business environments. In Table 1, we provide descriptive statistics for our sample.

Findings

We present our findings by comparing business professionals by generation and by access to enterprise SNPs. We grouped generation into three groups: Gen Y (21- to 30-year-olds), Gen X (31- to 50-year-olds), and Baby Boomers (51- to 65-year-olds). We do not include gender in these tables, as it provided no significant differences. In Tables 2 through 4, we present analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests of significance for

Table 1. Characteristics of Survey Sample.

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Men	124	54.6
Women	103	45.4
Age		
Gen Y (21-30 years old)	73	32.2
Gen X (31-50 years old)	103	45.3
Baby Boomers (51-65 years old)	51	22.5
Current professional position		
Accounting	17	7.5
Finance	14	6.2
Human resources	5	2.2
Information systems	39	17.2
Management	41	18.1
Marketing	15	6.6
Supply chain/operations	10	4.4
Other	86	37.9
Work in company with an enterprise social networking platform		
Yes	58	25.6
No	160	70.5
Don't know	9	4.0
Total	227	100

the frequency of use for selected communication channels for team communication (Table 2), perceived effectiveness of selected communication channels for team communication (Table 3), and attitudes toward social networking for team communication (Table 4).

Regarding frequency of use, we found no significant differences for the use of traditional communication channels. In other words, people of all age groups in organizations with or without enterprise SNPs use e-mail, face-to-face meetings, in-person conversations, and phone calls with roughly the same regularity. E-mail is the most frequently used team communication tool among employees of all groups. However, there are many significant differences for enterprise SNP communication tools:

- Business professionals in companies with enterprise SNPs are far more likely to use Web 2.0 communication tools than those in companies without SNPs. They are significantly more likely to do so for document sharing/wikis ($p = .00$), instant messaging ($p = .00$), private messages on social networks ($p = .00$), and public messages on social networks ($p = .00$).
- Within companies without enterprise SNPs, Gen Y professionals reported more use of some Web 2.0 communication tools compared to Baby Boomer

Table 2. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Tests of Significance for Frequency of Use of Selected Communication Channels.

Frequency	Without Enterprise Social Networking Platform						With Enterprise Social Networking Platform									
	Gen Y		Gen X		Baby Boomers		Gen Y		Gen X		Baby Boomers		Total			
	M (SD)	% Daily	M (SD)	% Daily	M (SD)	% Daily	M (SD)	% Daily	M (SD)	% Daily	M (SD)	% Daily	M (SD)	% Daily		
E-mail	2.54 (1.75)	76.0	2.04 (1.36)	87.5	2.32 (1.31)	81.1	1.81 (1.40)	95.2	1.76 (1.17)	85.7	1.81 (0.83)	100.0	2.13 (1.42)	85.3	1.71	.13
In-person unscheduled conversations	2.92 (1.44)	68.0	2.85 (1.47)	76.3	2.87 (1.35)	73.7	2.57 (1.39)	76.2	3.19 (1.91)	61.9	3.13 (1.25)	75.0	2.89 (1.46)	72.6	0.47	.79
Phone calls on a landline phone	3.85 (2.02)	52.1	3.39 (1.90)	60.0	3.39 (2.04)	60.5	3.40 (2.01)	55.0	3.00 (2.09)	66.7	2.71 (1.72)	71.4	3.41 (1.97)	59.3	1.02	.40
Phone calls on a cell phone	4.1 (1.71)	42.0	3.51 (1.84)	53.8	3.66 (1.86)	44.7	4.05 (2.10)	42.9	3.76 (2.40)	52.4	3.5 (1.71)	56.3	3.74 (1.89)	48.7	0.77	.57
Face-to-face scheduled meetings	4.28 (1.33)	30.0	4.43 (1.31)	25.0	4.37 (1.22)	23.7	3.81 (1.69)	33.3	3.86 (1.59)	42.9	3.75 (1.88)	50.0	4.23 (1.42)	30.1	1.43	.21
Document sharing/wikis	4.04 ^c (1.87)	42.0	4.59 ^d (2.16)	36.3	5.47 ^{a,d} (1.76)	21.1	3.00 ^{b,c,f} (1.97)	71.4	4.19 (1.86)	42.9	5.13 ^d (1.64)	20.0	4.47 (2.05)	37.8	5.32	.00 ^{***}
Texting	4.78 (1.79)	28.0	4.5 (1.99)	31.3	5.42 (1.67)	15.8	4.38 (2.31)	33.3	4.38 (2.22)	42.9	4.44 (1.78)	31.3	4.69 (1.95)	29.2	1.52	.18
Instant messaging	4.64 ^c (2.33)	38.0	5.43 ^d (2.13)	22.5	6.11 ^{a,d} (1.72)	13.5	3.62 ^{b,c} (2.65)	57.1	4.52 (2.22)	38.1	4.93 (2.08)	40.0	5.08 (2.26)	30.4	4.62	.00 ^{***}
Private messages on social network	6.02 ^d (1.46)	8.0	6.35 (1.17)	5.0	6.63 ^{d,f} (0.71)	0.0	5.57 ^c (1.96)	19.0	5.67 (1.27)	4.8	5.38 ^c (1.62)	18.8	6.12 (1.35)	7.1	3.94	.00 ^{***}
Group messages on social network	6.32 ^d (1.15)	4.0	6.6 ^{d,e} (0.89)	2.5	6.63 ^{d,e} (0.94)	2.6	5.00 ^{a,b,c} (2.02)	28.6	5.60 ^{b,c} (1.35)	5.0	6.13 (1.35)	13.3	6.27 (1.27)	6.3	8.18	.00 ^{***}

Note. Baby Boomers = respondents 51 to 65 years old; Gen X = respondents 31 to 50 years old; Gen Y = respondents 21 to 30 years old. Scale for frequency was 1 = hourly; 2 = several times per day; 3 = daily; 4 = a few times per week; 5 = weekly; 6 = rarely; 7 = never. Percentages are based on the number of professionals who responded 1 (hourly), 2 (several times per day), or 3 (daily). * p < .05; ** p < .01.

Based on Tukey post hoc tests, significant relationships are indicated with the following superscripts: ^aGen Y professionals without enterprise SNPs; ^bGen X professionals without enterprise social networking platforms (SNPs); ^cBaby Boomer professionals without enterprise SNPs; ^dGen Y professionals with enterprise SNPs; ^eGen X professionals with enterprise SNPs; ^fBaby Boomer professionals with enterprise SNPs.

Table 3. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Tests of Significance for Perceived Effectiveness of Selected Communication Channels.

Effectiveness	Without Enterprise Social Networking Platform				With Enterprise Social Networking Platform				Total	F	p					
	21-30		31-50		Over 50		21-30					31-50		Over 50		
	M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree				M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree	
Face-to-face meetings	3.44 (0.70)	88.0	3.41 (0.71)	87.5	3.5 (0.64)	97.4	3.40 (0.59)	90.5	3.38 (0.74)	85.7	3.25 (0.68)	87.5	3.41 (0.68)	89.4	0.32	.89
E-mail	3.39 (0.73)	86.0	3.3 (0.69)	85.0	3.38 (0.68)	86.5	3.10 (0.73)	75.0	3.19 (0.67)	85.7	3.40 (0.91)	68.8	3.33 (0.72)	83.5	0.69	.63
Face-to-face informal conversations	3.08 (0.80)	72.0	3.32 (0.71)	82.3	3.31 (0.70)	86.8	3.35 (0.74)	81.0	3.23 (0.70)	85.7	3.37 (0.80)	81.3	3.26 (0.74)	80.9	0.90	.48
Phone calls on a landline phone	2.92 (0.61)	63.3	3.23 (0.63)	81.3	3.05 (0.64)	73.7	3.10 (0.78)	81.0	3.00 (0.64)	76.2	3.20 (0.77)	80.0	3.10 (0.66)	75.4	1.33	.25
Phone calls on a cell phone	2.81 ^b (0.78)	64.0	3.25 ^a (0.64)	80.0	3 (0.69)	68.4	3.11 (0.69)	66.7	3.06 (0.68)	61.9	3.50 (0.65)	86.7	3.09 (0.71)	72.0	3.36	.00 ^{***}
Wikis/file sharing	3.09 (0.79)	71.4	2.94 (0.93)	52.6	2.85 ^d (0.85)	43.2	3.61 ^{c,f} (0.50)	85.7	3.0 (1.02)	61.9	2.09 ^b (0.94)	20.0	3.00 (0.90)	57.0	4.52	.00 ^{***}
Instant messaging	2.72 (0.92)	36.0	2.5 (1.10)	26.3	2.33 (0.88)	13.2	2.64 (1.11)	42.9	3 (0.78)	47.6	2.50 (0.97)	25.0	2.61 (1.00)	29.6	0.81	.54
Texting	2.47 (0.82)	36.0	2.6 (0.93)	45.0	2.33 (0.79)	23.7	2.72 (0.95)	42.9	2.92 (0.73)	50.0	2.91 (0.79)	50.0	2.61 (0.87)	40.0	1.36	.24
Private messages on an SNP	2.4 ^e (0.82)	14.0	1.9 (0.88)	10.0	2 ^d (1.00)	7.9	2.18 ^{b,c} (0.91)	28.6	2.3 (0.85)	23.8	2.22 (0.83)	25.0	2.12 (0.88)	14.6	0.87	.50
Group messages on an SNP	2.42 ^d (0.75)	16.0	1.6 (0.77)	3.8	1.77 ^d (0.66)	2.7	1.92 ^{a,c} (0.73)	14.3	2.35 (0.63)	19.0	2.57 (1.13)	31.3	2.00 (0.83)	10.7	4.08	.00 ^{***}

Note. Baby Boomers = respondents 51 to 65 years old; Gen X = respondents 31 to 50 years old; Gen Y = respondents 21 to 30 years old; SNP = social networking platform. The scale was 1 = not effective; 2 = somewhat effective; 3 = effective; 4 = extremely effective. Percentages based on the number of professionals who responded with 3 (effective) or 4 (extremely effective).

Based on Tukey post hoc tests, significant relationships indicated with the following superscripts: ^aGen Y professionals without enterprise SNPs; ^bGen X professionals without enterprise SNPs; ^cBaby Boomer professionals without enterprise SNPs; ^dGen Y professionals with enterprise SNPs; ^eGen X professionals with enterprise SNPs; ^fBaby Boomer professionals with enterprise SNPs. * p < .05; ** p < .01.

Table 4. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Tests of Significance for Attitudes toward Social Networking for Team Communication.

	Without Enterprise Social Networking Platform					With Enterprise Social Networking Platform					Total	F	p					
	21-30	31-50	Over 50	% Agree	M (SD)	21-30	31-50	Over 50	% Agree	M (SD)								
Online social networking . . .	M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree	M (SD)	% Agree						
Will become the primary form of communication for most work teams in the near future.	3.12 ^{b,c} (1.14)	37.3 (0.97)	2.48 ^{a,d,e} (0.97)	14.6 (0.97)	2.45 ^{a,d,e} (0.95)	10.5 (0.95)	2.45 ^{a,d,e} (0.95)	10.5 (0.95)	3.62 ^{b,c} (1.32)	57.1 (0.90)	3.29 ^{b,c} (0.90)	38.1 (0.90)	2.67 (0.9)	20.0 (1.10)	2.81 (1.10)	25.4 (1.10)	7.06	.00 ^{***}
Improves a team's ability to coordinate work tasks.	3.20 ^{b,c} (1.02)	33.3 (0.87)	2.63 ^{a,d} (0.87)	15.9 (0.87)	2.50 ^{a,d,e} (0.98)	13.2 (0.98)	2.50 ^{a,d,e} (0.98)	13.2 (0.98)	3.43 ^{b,c} (1.28)	47.6 (1.00)	3.29 ^{b,c} (1.00)	47.6 (1.00)	2.53 ^{b,c} (1.06)	20.0 (1.04)	2.86 (1.04)	25.4 (1.04)	5.51	.00 ^{***}
Allows team members to establish work roles more effectively.	2.88 (1.05)	21.6 (0.91)	2.54 (0.91)	17.1 (0.91)	2.36 ^d (0.90)	11.1 (0.90)	2.36 ^d (0.90)	11.1 (0.90)	3.14 ^c (1.27)	38.1 (1.04)	3 (1.04)	23.8 (0.84)	2.6 (0.84)	14.3 (1.01)	2.69 (1.01)	19.6 (1.01)	3.03	.02 [*]
Allows team members to become more committed to one another.	2.92 (1.11)	31.4 (0.92)	2.52 (0.92)	14.6 (0.92)	2.45 (0.92)	13.2 (0.92)	2.45 (0.92)	13.2 (0.92)	3.24 (1.22)	33.3 (1.11)	2.9 (1.11)	23.8 (1.08)	2.43 (1.08)	21.4 (1.05)	2.70 (1.05)	21.1 (1.05)	2.88	.01 [*]
Allows team members to produce higher-quality work.	2.82 (1.03)	19.6 (0.86)	2.43 ^d (0.86)	8.5 (0.86)	2.45 (1.01)	15.8 (1.01)	2.45 (1.01)	15.8 (1.01)	3.1 ^{b,f} (1.26)	28.6 (1.11)	2.95 (1.11)	33.3 (0.83)	2.13 ^d (0.83)	0.0 (1.01)	2.61 (1.01)	15.8 (1.01)	3.45	.00 ^{***}
Facilitates more effective face-to-face interactions among team members.	3.18 ^b (1.05)	41.2 (0.93)	2.52 ^a (0.93)	14.6 (0.93)	2.53 (0.95)	13.2 (0.95)	2.53 (0.95)	13.2 (0.95)	3.10 (1.41)	33.3 (1.16)	3.05 (1.16)	33.3 (1.16)	2.40 (1.05)	20.0 (1.07)	2.76 (1.07)	20.2 (1.07)	3.95	.00 ^{***}

Note. Baby Boomers = respondents 51 to 65 years old; Gen X = respondents 31 to 50 years old; Gen Y = respondents 21 to 30 years old. The scale was 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. Percentages based on the number of professionals who stated 4 (agree) or 5 (strongly agree). Based on Tukey post hoc tests, significant relationships indicated with the following superscripts: ^aGen Y professionals without enterprise SNPs; ^bGen X professionals without enterprise SNPs; ^cBaby Boomer professionals without enterprise SNPs; ^dGen Y professionals with enterprise SNPs; ^eGen X professionals with enterprise SNPs; ^fBaby Boomer professionals with enterprise SNPs. * p < .05; *** p < .01.

employees, including document sharing ($p = .00$) and wikis and instant messaging ($p = .00$).

- Gen Y professionals in companies with an enterprise SNP are the most likely to use social media tools. For example, a majority of these professionals use document sharing or wikis (71.4%) and instant messaging (57.1%) on a daily basis for team communication.

Regarding perceived effectiveness of team communication tools, we found that traditional communication tools are considered most effective for team communication. Across all generational groups, face-to-face meetings, in-person conversations, e-mail, and phone calls are considered the most effective communication tools. Even in companies with enterprise SNPs, these traditional tools are considered the most effective.

Whereas we found significant differences regarding frequency of use for virtually all enterprise SNP communication tools, we did not find significant differences for the perceived effectiveness of instant messaging, texting, or private messages on SNPs. We did find that Gen Y professionals in companies with enterprise SNPs thought that document sharing and wikis and group messages on SNPs were more effective as team communication tools than did employees in companies without enterprise SNPs.

Regarding attitudes toward social networking platforms, there are significant differences for each belief. In particular, the following beliefs are most notable in the context of future trends:

- Compared to Gen X and Baby Boomer professionals in organizations without enterprise SNPs, both Gen Y and Gen X professionals in organizations with enterprise SNPs are significantly more likely to believe that enterprise social networking will become the primary form of communication for most work teams ($p = .00$) and will improve a team's ability to coordinate work tasks ($p = .00$).
- Only Gen Y professionals in organizations with enterprise SNPs are more likely to believe that SNPs lead to high-quality work ($p = .00$).

Conclusions

The results of our survey provide plenty of support for the views of social business realists and social business enthusiasts. Here we provide what we consider the most important conclusions regarding the future use of social networking for business communication.

Rich communication channels are still preferred. Business professionals—regardless of generational group or access to enterprise SNPs—view richer (involving more vocal and nonverbal cues), traditional communication channels as most effective for team communication. The vast majority considered face-to-face scheduled meetings (89.4%), in-person unscheduled conversations (81.3%), phone calls on landlines (75.4%), and phone calls on mobile phones (72.0%) effective team communication

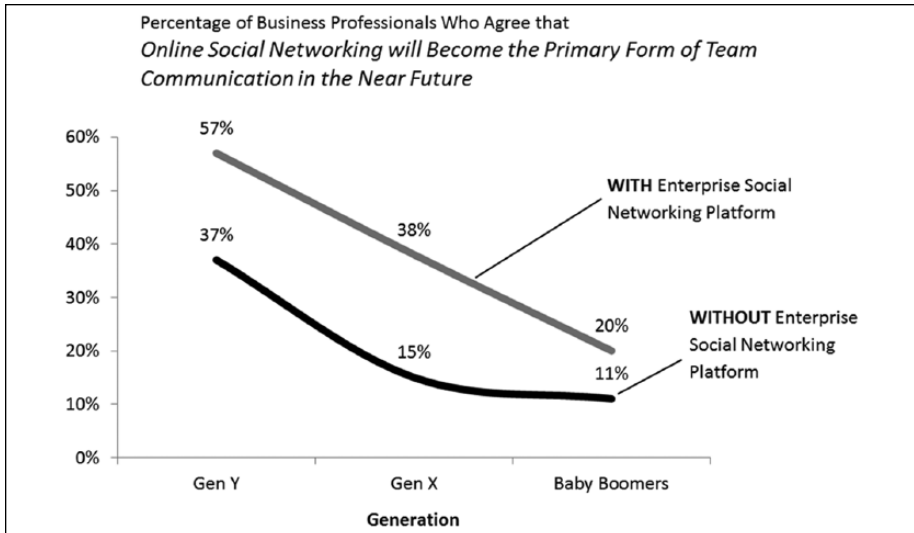


Figure 2. The future of social networking as a team communication tool.

tools. Furthermore, while many social business enthusiasts claim that enterprise SNPs facilitate more effective in-person interactions, just a small minority of business professionals believe that enterprise SNPs lead to more effective face-to-face interactions. Even in companies with enterprise SNPs, just one-third of Gen Y (33.3%) and Gen X (33.3%) business professionals believe this to be the case.

Business professionals who use enterprise social networking platforms are more likely to recognize their advantages. Business professionals of all generational groups who work at organizations with enterprise SNPs are far more likely to see the advantages. For example, in Figures 2 and 3, we illustrate agreement with two statements: *online social networking will become the primary form of team communication in the near future* and *online social networking improves a team's ability to coordinate work tasks*. The relationships in these charts hold for each of the attitudes associated with social networking for team communication. Typically, there are between 15% and 25% increases in positive views of social networking within the same age groups. We believe that these findings are indicative of the learning curve. When most professionals think about social media, they often envision public SNPs such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Once they use an enterprise SNP designed specifically for business use, they are far more likely to see the benefits.

Skepticism about the value of enterprise social networking platforms may be indicative of the cultural barriers to rapid adoption. While it's true that professionals in companies with enterprise SNPs are far more likely to view them positively, they are still viewed with lackluster support, particularly in comparison to richer, more traditional channels of communication. Among the most receptive groups—Gen Y and

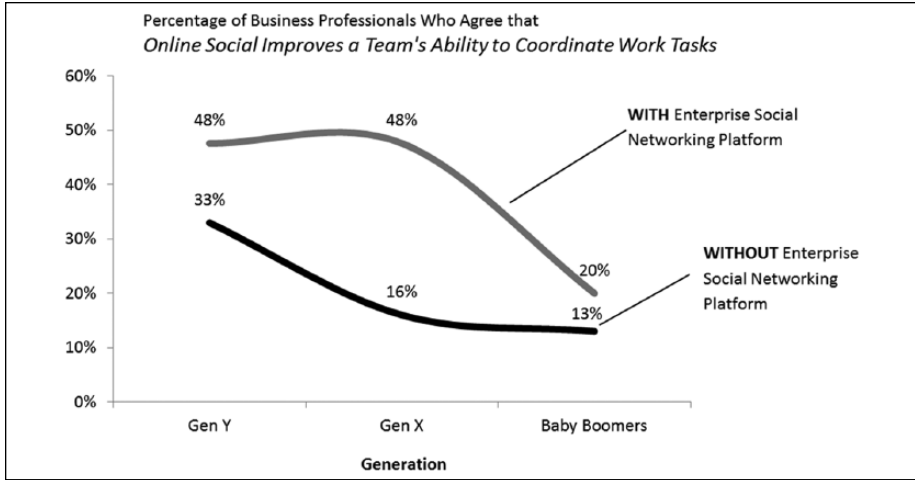


Figure 3. Coordinating work tasks with social networking.

Gen X business professionals with access to enterprise SNPs—roughly half believe that social networking will become the primary form of team communication and that it improves a team's ability to coordinate work tasks. However, just under one-quarter to just over one-third of this group (23.8%-38.1%) agree that social networking allows team members to establish work roles more effectively, allows team members to become more committed to one another, or allows team members to produce higher quality work. While social business enthusiasts extol the virtues of enterprise SNPs for more effective collaboration and higher productivity, most business professionals in our sample lack these convictions.

We suspect that culture—existing beliefs and norms about how teams collaborate and communicate—is one possible reason for the lackluster enthusiasm among business professionals. In other words, while the technology may be designed to enhance collaboration, cultural barriers remain that hinder adoption. These barriers may include hesitancy to move away from more comfortable and reliable communication channels (such as e-mail), lack of support from managers, and unclear accountability and incentive systems.

E-mail will not go away soon. The behaviors and attitudes of the business professionals in our sample seem to indicate that the rise of enterprise SNPs may not imply the demise of e-mail in the short run, as social business enthusiasts believe. E-mail is overwhelmingly the most frequently used channel for team communication even in progressive companies that have adopted enterprise SNPs. The vast majority (85.3%) of professionals with enterprise SNPs continue to use e-mail on an hourly basis, and the vast majority (83.5%) likewise consider it effective.

The closest SNP tools to e-mail are private and public messages on SNPs. Even among the most receptive professional group—Gen Y professionals in companies with enterprise SNPs—just a small fraction considered private messages (28.6%) and public messages (14.3%) effective for team communication. Similarly, among this

group, less than a majority considered texting (42.9%) and instant messaging (42.9%) effective for team communication. By comparison, the vast majority (90.5%) of these professionals felt that e-mail is effective for team communication.

Enterprise social networking platforms may emerge as the primary form of business communication. We believe that our results somewhat reinforce industry estimates that social networking will become the primary communication tool for teams. Based on our survey results combined with results from industry surveys (i.e., AON Consulting, 2009; Azua, 2010; Bughin et al., 2009; Kiett, 2011), we believe that adoption of enterprise SNPs is in the beginning of the early majority stage according to Rogers' (1962) model of innovation adoption. In our sample, roughly 26% of professionals worked at companies with enterprise SNPs. This is similar to Kiett's (2011) study showing that 28% of American information workers use social tools for work communication. Furthermore, in most of our attitude items, roughly 20% to 25% of our sample agrees with various statements about social networking for team communication. In other words, these professionals who hold positive and optimistic views of enterprise SNPs are most likely the innovators and early adopters who may push adoption of enterprise SNPs to critical mass in the years to come. In Figure 4, we've depicted our projection of enterprise SNP adoption based on Rogers' (1962) diffusion of innovations model. We view this projection as a likely scenario and expect it will follow an adoption path much in line with that of public SNPs, albeit roughly 5 to 10 years later.

We believe that demographic forces—the preferences of both Gen Y and Gen X business professionals—will drive enterprise SNPs closer to critical mass whereby business professionals will begin rapidly adopting these tools. Our survey shows widespread support among these groups. In companies with enterprise SNPs, which we view as the testing ground for future adoption, the majority of Gen Y professionals (57.1%) expect social networking to become the primary team communication tool. Nearly 4 in 10 Gen X professionals (38.1%) also hold this view. With increasing numbers of younger professionals entering the workforce and increasingly user-friendly enterprise SNPs developed for team communication, we anticipate that enterprise SNPs will overtake e-mail as the most common form of business communication in the next decade.

Limitations to and Contributions of this Study

We note several limitations to this study. First, we cannot account for the implementation of various enterprise SNPs. Many software packages are available, ranging from freeware to expensive custom-built systems. The range in quality can affect how receptive users are to these systems. Furthermore, we cannot account for how much training and encouragement have been used to help professionals adopt enterprise SNPs. Obviously, even if the software would help business professionals communicate more effectively in teams, unless they are trained in how to use these new systems effectively, they may not know the benefits. Second, we did not take into consideration company size or industry. We suspect that enterprise SNPs will benefit certain types of companies and certain industries more so than others. Finally, we have attempted to

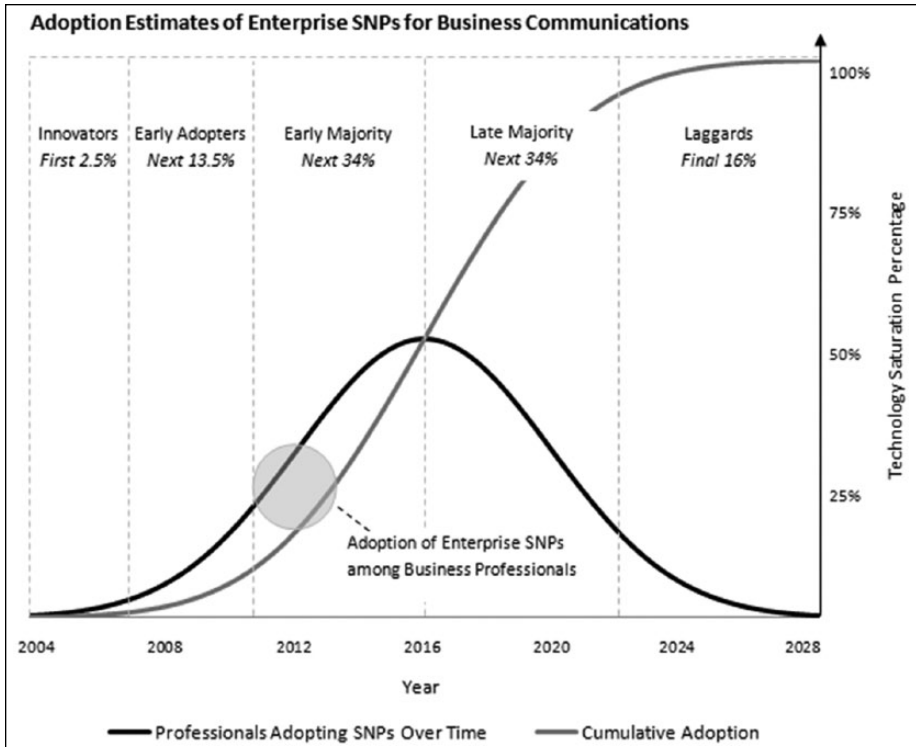


Figure 4. Adoption of enterprise social networking platforms (SNPs).

use our findings as indicators of future use. Obviously, we can't precisely forecast future adoptions of enterprise SNPs for team communication and the frequency of its use. However, we do view our data and related findings in conjunction with industry estimates as signals that the business world is close to a tipping point where enterprise SNPs are increasingly adopted and used.

Admittedly this study has limitations. However, it is also the first known academic study that examines enterprise SNPs for team communication in comparison to more traditional communication channels. It is also the first study in the business communication field to examine enterprise SNPs for team communication.

Implications for Business Communication Scholars and Instructors

Within a few years, communication tools on enterprise SNPs may be the dominant form of team communication in many companies. Furthermore, these tools may soon (the next 5-10 years) become the dominant form of team communication in most companies. Similarly, we suspect many areas of business communication—including all internal employee communications and external communications with suppliers,

clients, customers, and other partners—will increasingly rely on enterprise SNPs. We view these trends as rare opportunities for business communication scholars to advance, define, and set apart the field.

To date, nearly all academic research about social media has been confined to public SNPs. Most of this research focuses on marketing or public relations. Within the business communication field, pedagogical and nonpedagogical research has similarly focused almost exclusively on public SNPs.

Business communication scholars have a rare opportunity to advance knowledge about enterprise SNPs for workplace communication. In fact, business communication scholars who research enterprise SNPs and their role in team collaboration and communication during the early majority stage of adoption are likely to write seminal works on the topic that could influence business communication, leadership, management, human resources, and other disciplines. We recommend that business scholars consider the following options:

- Examine constructs such as social capital, impression management, face negotiation, and self-disclosure in the context of business communication via enterprise SNPs.
- Analyze the varying rhetorical patterns, functions, and value of various enterprise social tools, such as user profiles, wikis, blogs, microblogs, video calls, and video and audio podcasts.
- Research generational and gender differences in attitudes toward and use of enterprise SNP communication tools.
- Conduct case studies of enterprise SNP adoption and provide a holistic examination of effects on communication climate with selected organizations.

In conclusion, we encourage business communication scholars to get ahead of the curve on this growing form of workplace communication. The business communication community, for the most part, responded with scholarly work to the adoption of public SNPs once they were in the late majority stage. By producing insightful research about business communication via enterprise SNPs during the early majority stage, the business communication community will advance its standing by producing seminal works in this area and more clearly define and set itself apart from the marketing field.

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