Online Reputation Management in a Digital World: Frances VC Ryan

Thesis summary

This doctoral investigation is concerned with the role of online information in the creation, building, and evaluation of personal reputations. In this context term "personal reputation" refers to the reputation of private individuals rather than corporate identity and brand. Two broad research themes are being investigated: (1) the means by which people evaluate or assess the personal reputations of others from the online evidence available to them and (2) how people manage their own personal reputations through their use of online information, and to what extent those behaviours are intentional. These themes are addressed with reference to the broader information science literature on information behaviour and use, including aspects of bibliometric research that focuses on citation practice and citation analysis and prior work on everyday life information seeking (ELIS). Four research questions have been developed for this research, as outlined in the table below.

Number	Research question
RQ1	How do individuals build identities for themselves online?
RQ2	How do individuals use online information to build and manage their reputations?
RQ3	How do individuals evaluate the identities and reputations of others based on the information available to them online?
RQ4	To what extent are individuals actively practicing identity and reputation building and evaluation online?

Literature review

The interdisciplinary nature of the research themes means that much of the relevant academic literature has been found to be dispersed across a number of other subject domains. Included in this are articles from computing, employment research, human-computer interaction, human resources management, information systems, management and organisational studies, marketing, media and communication studies, and physical and mental health. These themes and concepts are also researched in the domain of information science through *citation analysis*. Citations can help to build a researcher's own identity and reputation as well as the identity and reputations of others, as well as help researchers increase their visibility among peers (Cronin & Atkins, 2010; Cronin, 1985). These citations can impact both the *researchers giving the citation* and the *researchers receiving the citation*. In addition to traditional academic literature, an examination of non-academic sources—for example current news stories, as well as reported trends in social media use—has been undertaken. These non-academic sources indicate that topics related to information seeking behavior, as related to personal reputation management, are also of interest to professionals in human resources and reputation management fields, social media practitioners and owners, and managers of online platforms and social networking sites, as well as a large portion of society as a whole.

Methodology

The research approach adopted for this study has involved the use of participant diaries and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, as is common in ELIS studies. A multi-step data collection process was undertaken using Rieh's study from 2004 and Hilligoss and Rieh's study from 2007 as guides (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008; Rieh, 2004). Participants were asked to keep a diary over the course of one week as they engaged with their social media accounts. Following the completion of the diaries, participants took part in hour-long, semi-structured interviews. Short participant surveys were also conducted prior to the diary exercise to collect demographic and social media use data. The study participants are social media users located within the United Kingdom. The full data set includes 45 participants aged 18-69, representing members from Generation Y (15 aged 18-34), Generation X (15 aged 35-50), and Baby Boomers (15 participants 51-69).

Progress to date and next steps

At this point (March 2016) the main data collection for the empirical study has been completed and the data partially analysed. Work is currently focused on completing the analysis of the data in each generation set, after which decisions will be made on whether or not to do a second round of data collection. Once all data collection and analysis is completed, work will start on writing up the whole project.

Research problem suggestions for discussion

- How do you anchor a multidisciplinary thesis theme, such as this one, in the domain of information science when writing up your work?
- How do you know when you have 'enough' data to analyse for the award of PhD?
- How do you balance working on your thesis with other opportunities, e.g. involvement in public engagement activities, committee memberships, conference/journal submissions?

References

Cronin, B. (1985). *The citation process: The role and significance of citations in scientific communication*. London: Taylor Graham. doi:10.1016/0306-4573(85)90080-9

Cronin, B., & Atkins, H. B. (Eds.). (2010). *The web of knowledge: A festschrift in honor of Eugene Garfield*. Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc.

Hilligoss, B., & Rieh, S. Y. (2008). Developing a unifying framework of credibility assessment: Construct, heuristics, and interaction in context. *Information Processing and Management*, *44*(4), 1467–1484. doi:10.1016/j.ipm.2007.10.001

Rieh, S. Y. (2004). On the Web at home: Information seeking and Web searching in the home environment. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, *55*(8), 743–753. doi:10.1002/asi.20018

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Summary

PhD student in the Centre for Social Informatics at Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing, exploring the role of online information in personal reputation management and evaluation. Research interests include social media use and behaviours, online reputation and identity, everyday life information seeking and behaviours, and digital information sharing.

Education

Edinburgh Napier University; Edinburgh, Scotland, UK
PhD student in the School of Computing (*Expected completion: 2017*)
> Research topic: The role of online information in personal reputation
> Research domain: Information Science

University of Stirling; Stirling, Scotland, UK
Master of Letters in Media and Culture; Nov 2012 *(With Distinction)*
> Dissertation topic: *The impact of social networking sites in the distribution and spread of news and information*

Central Washington University; Ellensburg, Wash., USA
> Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations, Minor in Historical Tourism; June 2003

Edinburgh Napier University; Edinburgh, Scotland, UK
> Study abroad courses in communications, public relations, and tourism; Oct 2001-June 2002

Cle Elum Roslyn High School; Cle Elum, Wash., USA
> General baccalaureate diploma, subjects including: English, maths, sciences, social studies, music, physical education, and art; June 1992

Publications and Presentations

Ryan, F., Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., Lawson, A. (2016). **Personal online reputation: the development of an approach to investigate how personal reputation is evaluated and managed in online environments.** In: *Proceedings of the 2nd International Data Information and Information Management Conference (IDIMC)*. *(Awarded best paper.)*

Ryan, F., Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., Lawson, A. (2015). **Assessing the available and accessible evidence: How personal reputations are determined and managed online.** Paper presented at *Information: interactions and impact (i3) 2015*, June 2015, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland.

Ryan, F. (2014). **Online reputation management in a digital world: Designing the study.** Poster presented at ISIC Conference, 2-5 September 2014, Leeds.

Ryan, F. (2014). **Life in a digital fishbowl: Managing your reputation online.** Invited talk at Skeptics on the Fringe, Edinburgh, 18 August 2014.

Ryan, F. (2014). **Online reputation management in a digital world.** Poster presented at SICSA PhD Conference, 9 June 2014, St Andrews, Scotland. *(Short-listed for award.)*

Civic and Volunteer Activities

Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team; Postgraduate Student Representative; Edinburgh Napier University
(April 2015—present)
- Student representative on committee to oversee the implementation of the university's Athena SWAN Bronze Award action plan
- Sponsor for action to implement networking group on gender equality issues across three campuses

Research and Innovation Committee; PhD Student Representative; Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing
(June 2015—present)
- Partial committee remit includes:
  - Advise university's Research and Innovation Committee on the School of Computing's implementation of research and innovation strategies
  - Promote vibrate research culture within School of Computing
  - Ensure effective support mechanism are in place for research students and staff
- Position includes role as general PhD student representative, liaising with students and staff

Connect; Student Champion; Edinburgh Napier University (www.napierconnect.org)
(Sept 2014—Aug 2015)
- Organise networking and educational events for female students studying computing, engineering and the built environment at Edinburgh Napier University

Joseph A. Aliseo Jr. Foundation; Roslyn, Wash., USA (www.eat-at-joes.org)
(2007—2011)

Polycystic Kidney Disease Foundation, Seattle Chapter; USA (www.pkdcure.org)
(2005—2009)

Professional Experience

Sporting Chance Initiative; Public Relations and Communications Manager; Stirling, Scotland
(Aug 2012—Sept 2013)
Responsible for all communications activities for government-funded business support project

Freelance Communications Consultant; Edinburgh, Scotland & Kittitas County, Wash., USA
(Jan 2000—Sept 2013)
Writing and editing for print and web, social media support and consultation, layout and design, and brand and identity support.

Washington State University College of Business; Creative Director, Communications Director; Pullman, Wash., USA (July 2006—July 2011)
Responsible for managing all publications, communication strategies, and media relations

Foster Pepper PLLC; Marketing Coordinator; Seattle, Wash., USA (Aug 2004—May 2006)

Customer Service Work; Kittitas County, Wash., USA (Feb 1989—Aug 2001)

Contact information

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