

Building identity in online environments: an Information Science perspective

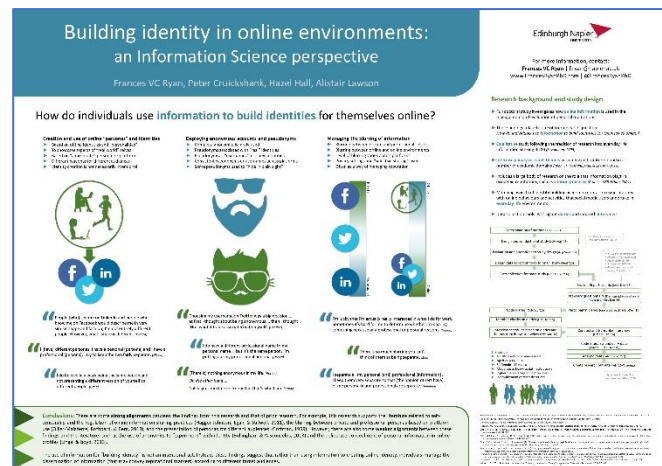
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citation practices, everyday life information seeking, identity, information behaviour and use, online identity, social media, social networking, reputation



This poster concerns an aspect of information behaviour and use related to social media with regards to the creation of online identity. This qualitative study follows the tradition of research into everyday life information seeking (ELIS). The findings shared here relate to a research question as applied to the theme of reputation management: **How do individuals use information to build identities for themselves online?**

The poster content shares findings related to three areas of identity building. These are:

- (1) The creation and use of online “personas” and identities
- (2) The use of anonymity and pseudonyms through information sharing – or concealment – practices
- (3) The ways in which private and professional selves blur or merge together in online environments

This study used qualitative methods with participant diaries and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. It involved 45 UK-based participants, and data collection took place between October 2015 and January 2016. Participants kept diaries for a week in which they logged everyday information sharing practices on social media that they regarded as having impacts on individual reputations, including questions related to identity. Participants then took part in semi-structured interviews of about one hour in length. Interviews were based on themes from the literature review, with diary entries used as additional prompts.

The main finding presented here is that individuals present elements of their offline lives using online information to showcase different “personas”. However, they do not do this with the intention of building identity. The findings explored in this presentation are contextualised with reference to identity building in the more formal setting of academic reputation management, i.e. through the use of citations.

The full doctoral study investigates this theme in more detail, including the relationship between building online identities, showcasing aspects of identity or “personas”, and the building and maintenance of personal reputation. This work will be completed in 2018.



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Meet Frances

I am **Frances Ryan**, a **PhD student at Edinburgh Napier University's School of Computing**. I am an American native from a rural community in the mountains of Washington State, currently living in Scotland. I hold a **Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations** from Central Washington University (USA) and a **Master of Letters in Media and Culture** (*with distinction*) from the University of Stirling (Scotland).

My research interests include **everyday life information seeking (ELIS), human information behaviour and use, social media, social informatics, online information sharing, and online reputation and identity**. I am interested in collaborations on these (and related) interests. I am also keen to discuss opportunities for post-doctoral research projects based on the output of my PhD thesis or similar themes.



About my PhD (expected: 2018)

Reputation management in a digital world: the role of online information in the management and evaluation of personal reputations

This qualitative study is concerned with the role of online information in the building, maintenance, and evaluation of personal reputations. The main contributions of the research relate to: (1) the means by which people evaluate or assess the personal reputations of others from the online evidence available to them, and (2) strategies for the management of personal reputations through the use of online information, including the extent to which these behaviours are intentional. The findings extend knowledge within the domain of Information Science, notably in respect of the established bodies of research on information behaviour and use, and Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS). They are set against a theoretical framework that is anchored to research in bibliometrics (for example on citation practice and citation analysis), and takes into account the multidisciplinary nature of the field of Information Science.

PhD supervisors

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Selected publications

Ryan, F., Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., Lawson, A. (2017). Building identity in online environments: An Information Science perspective. Poster presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIST) 2017*, Washington DC, US, 27 October – 1 November 2017.

Ryan, F., Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., Lawson, A. (2017). Blurred reputations: Managing profession and private information online. Paper presented at *i3: information: interactions and impact (i3) 2017*, Aberdeen, Scotland.

Ryan, F., Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., Lawson, A. (2016). Managing and evaluating personal reputations on the basis of information shared on social media: A Generation X perspective. *Information Research*.

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., Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., Lawson, A. (2014). Online reputation management in a digital world: Designing the study. Poster presented at *Information Seeking in Context (ISIC) Conference*, 2-5 September 2014, Leeds, England.