

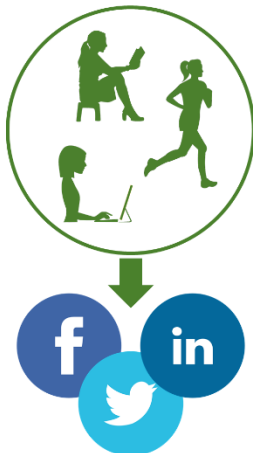
Building identities online

Frances VC Ryan, Peter Cruickshank, Hazel Hall, Alistair Lawson | School of Computing

How do individuals use **information to build identities** for themselves online?

Creating and using online personas and identities

- ▶ Based on offline identities and personalities
- ▶ To showcase aspects of “real world” selves
- ▶ Based on “appropriate” persona for platform
- ▶ Different personas for different audiences
- ▶ Identity creation is not necessarily intentional

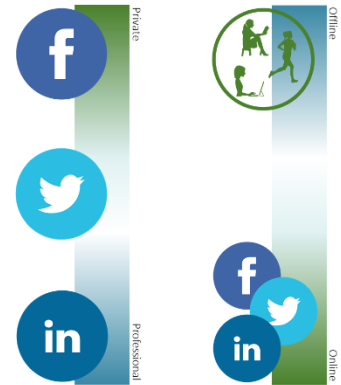


Deploying anonymous accounts and pseudonyms

- ▶ Complete anonymity is rarely used
- ▶ Pseudonyms associated with “real” identities
- ▶ Pseudonyms as “usernames”, not new identities
- ▶ Consistent pseudonyms across platforms
- ▶ Some pseudonyms used to “hide in plain sight”

Managing the blurring of information

- ▶ Between private and professional selves
- ▶ Between offline and online environments
- ▶ Levels of blurring varies across platforms
- ▶ Privacy settings and “selective sharing” used
- ▶ Often as a way of managing reputation



For more information, please contact **Frances VC Ryan**, Centre for Social Informatics
f.ryan@napier.ac.uk | www.FrancesRyanPhD.com | @FrancesRyanPhD

Edinburgh Napier
UNIVERSITY



Presenter: **Frances VC Ryan** (School of Computing)

Co-authors: Peter Cruickshank, Hazel Hall, Alistair Lawson

Building identities online

This poster is part of a larger doctoral study that investigates how online information is used in the management and evaluation of personal reputations and follows the tradition of research into everyday life information seeking (ELIS). The doctoral investigation considers four research questions (see table below). This poster addresses the first of these questions “**How do individuals use information to build identities for themselves online?**”.

Number	Research question
RQ1	How do individuals use information to 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 do individuals actively practise identity and reputation building and evaluation online?

The findings shared here consider three areas of identity building. The first is related to **the creation and use of online personas and identities**. This includes an examination of three broad information behaviours that participants use for the portrayal of online identities. The second area investigates **the use of anonymity and pseudonyms** through information sharing – or concealment – practices, as well as some of the motivations behind these behaviours. The third and final area **presents the ways in which the blurring or merging together of participants’ private and professional selves**, as well as their online and offline environments, are used for building identity online.

For more information, please contact **Frances VC Ryan**, Centre for Social Informatics
f.ryan@napier.ac.uk | www.FrancesRyanPhD.com | @FrancesRyanPhD

The role of online information in the creation, building, and evaluation of personal reputations

This PhD is concerned with the role of online information in the creation, building, and evaluation of personal reputations. 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

(2) how people manage their own personal reputations through their use of online information, and to what extent those behaviours are intentional.

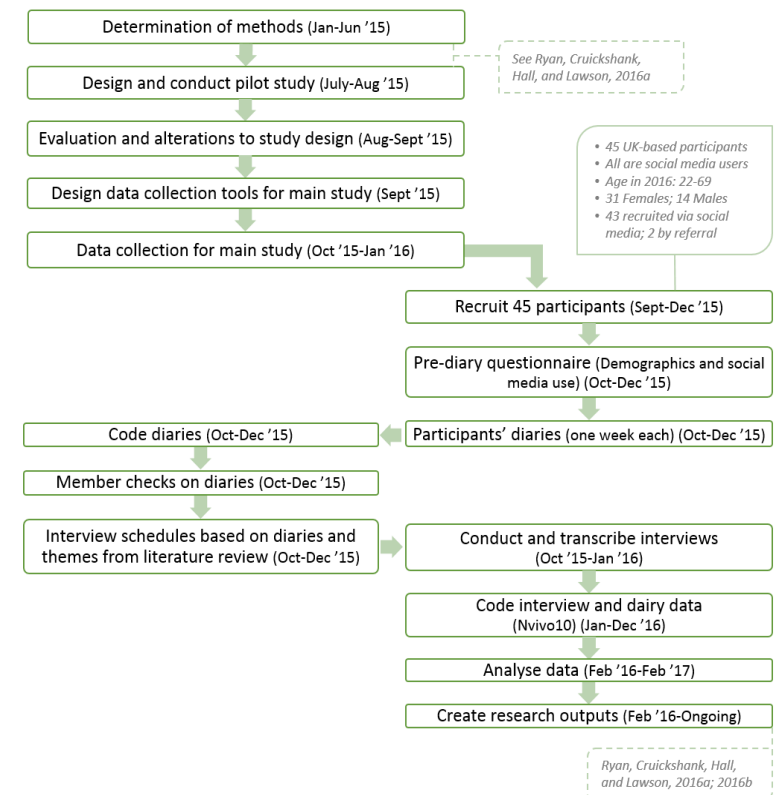
These themes are addressed with reference to the broader information science literature on information behaviour and use, including aspects of bibliometric research that focuses on citation practice and citation analysis and prior work on everyday life information seeking (ELIS). The research approach involves the use of participant diaries and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, as is common in ELIS studies.

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, and increase their visibility among peers. 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 behaviour, 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.

Methods of investigation and sample

The qualitative methods used for this study draw upon approaches used in everyday life information seeking studies with the use of participant diaries and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This method was selected as the most practical and ethical approach^{1,2}. There were 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. Participants then took part in semi-structured interviews of about one hour in length. Interviews were based on themes from the literature review³, with diary entries used as additional prompts (see Figure below).



(1) Ryan, F., Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., & Lawson, A. (2016a). Managing and evaluating personal reputations on the basis of information shared on social media: a Generation X perspective. *Information Research*, 21(4).

(2) Ryan, F., et al. (2016b). Personal online reputation: the development of an approach to investigate how personal reputation is evaluated and managed in online environments. In *2nd International Data Information and Information Management Conference (IDIMC)* (pp. 98–108). Loughborough: LISU.

(3) Ryan, F., et al. (2015). Assessing the available and accessible evidence: how personal reputations are determined and managed online. In *Information: interactions and impact (i3) 2015*, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland.