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

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification, and that it is the result of my own independent work.

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Date

Abstract

This work is concerned with the role of online information in the building, management, and evaluation of personal reputations. The main contributions of the research relate to: (1) the means by which people evaluate the personal reputations of others from the online evidence available to them, and (2) strategies for the building and management of personal reputations through the use of online information. The findings extend knowledge within the domain of Information Science, notably with respect to the established body of research on human information behaviour and use. 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.

A multi-step data collection process was implemented following the practice of extant studies in Information Science and human information behaviour and use. This focused on a sample of forty-five UK-based social media users. A qualitative analysis of data collected from participant diaries and interviews was undertaken using NVivo10.

The main contribution of this work with respect to the evaluation of personal reputations on the basis on online evidence is that the information available is largely consumed and evaluated in a passive manner: social media users are more interested in the content of the information that is shared on social media platforms than they are in the signals that this information might convey about the sharer(s). Closer attention is paid in cases where the information shared is in stark contrast to the opinions and practices of those who consume it. In terms of the management of personal reputations through the use of online information, this work introduces and develops new concepts related to managing the "blur" that occurs at the intersection between private and professional lives, and online and offline environments.

Publications associated with this research

Ryan, F., Cruickshank, P., Hall, H., Lawson, A. (2018). Blurred reputations: Managing professional and private information online. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science.*

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. (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 and Information Management Conference (IDIMC)*. *(Awarded best paper.)*

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Table of contents

List of figures

List of tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and aims

The research presented in this thesis is concerned with information sharing practices of individuals on social networking platforms as related to personal reputation. In this context, the term "personal reputation" refers to the reputation of private individuals rather than corporate identity and brand. There are two broad research themes being investigated: (1) the means by which people evaluate 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.

These themes are addressed with reference to the broader Information Science literature, including aspects of bibliometric research that focuses on citation practice and citation analysis and prior work on human information behaviour and use.

Three widely-used social media platforms are considered in this research: Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

The broad aim of this doctoral investigation was to develop new knowledge related to the use of online information in the building, management, and evaluation of personal reputations. This was achieved through the development of a theoretical framework that considers the extent to which social media users replicate the established information practices of academics through their information behaviours in online environments (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5). This work has established that there are similarities between social media practice and citation practice.

1.2 Theory and research methods

Predominate methods of investigation used in citation analysis studies tend to use quantitative research. Approaches vary, including those that evaluate the citation analysis and practices of a single individual (Cronin & Shaw, 2007), analyse samples of more than 440 manuscripts and more than 920 referee reports submitted to a single journal (Sugimoto & Cronin, 2013), and those that span 100 years covering approximately 96,000 papers (Sugimoto & Cronin, 2012a). However, there is also a limited number of studies that include at least some level of qualitative research. Included in these is Hyland's (2003) study investigating self-citation where semi-structured interviews were conducted with two researchers from each of the eight disciplines investigated to determine an “insider” understanding of preferences and practices (Hyland, 2003). The limited number of qualitative studies, including those investigating the motivations behind a citing author’s referencing behaviours, has been noted as a central problem within citation analysis (Cronin, 2000, p. 447).

Studies investigating social media practices and human information behaviour and use, however, tend to use more qualitative research methods. This is possibly because these studies are trying to answer questions surrounding individuals’ motivations and reasoning behind their actions. As the purpose of this doctoral investigation is to determine *how* and *why* participants use online information to build, manage, and evaluate identity and reputation, it is appropriate to use these same qualitative methods.

1.3 Key concepts and definitions

This work relates to three broad, key concepts which have helped to underpin this research. These are information, reputation, and identity. The concept of the “real world” is also addressed, especially as it relates to findings from the empirical data. These concepts are explained below, with simplified definitions outlined in Table 1 at the end of this section.

1.3.1 Information

The ways in which online information is accessed, used, and shared in online environments, and the extent to which that information contributes to the creation of individuals’ reputations, is important to this study and the domain of Information Science as a whole. This is illustrated by Marcia Bates (1999, p. 1048) who said, “We always follow the information”.

In his classic Information Science text, Buckland (1991, pp. 351-360) argues that information can be identified, sorted, and characterised to create three basic groupings: (1) information-as-process; (2) information-as-knowledge; and (3) information-as-thing. He identifies process as information which is learned or communicated; knowledge as an intangible understanding, belief, or opinion; and thing as a tangible rendering of information such as books, data, or other physical or readable objects. He suggests that “information-as-thing” should be of special interest to the study of Information Science.

For the purpose of this research, Buckland’s concept of “information-as-thing” will act as the guiding principle. To that, information is defined as *any tangible object that can be accessed and viewed online*. This is on the basis that the concept comprises data and documents which can be informative, as well as other tangible objects and forms of information, making it the most appropriate way to conceive and treat the term “information”.

1.3.2 Reputation

The concept of reputation has been discussed or alluded to for centuries, despite the word itself only appearing in the English language since the mid-14th century[1]. Early discourse about the concept include stories shared through the fables of Aesop and biblical passages and parables (Aesop, n.d.; Proverbs 22, Ecclesiastes 7, Matthew 25 Revised New Jerusalem Bible). This provides early evidence that reputation is an important component in human societies.

It has been stated that reputation is traditionally thought of as a form of social esteem within an individual’s community, and that all individuals have a reputation – good or bad (Origgi, 2012). These reputations can be an essential part of an individual’s identity on the Internet in a different manner than in the physical world because of the way in which online environments allow anyone to create information to be shared and transmitted.

Reputation managers Fertik and Thompson (2010, pp. 16-20) make the claim that “your online reputation is your reputation”. They argue that your reputation shapes your real-world interactions and that others will make instant judgments on an individual based on their reputation alone. Mayfield (2010, p. xiii) shares a similar sentiment with the assertion that there are three “important reasons” for individuals to manage their online reputations: The modern world is quickly moving online, the

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[1] *Merriam-Webster.com: Reputation.* (n.d.). Retrieved 27 July 2018 from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reputation.

Internet is the first place many people will look for information about an individual, and being found online will allow for more opportunities in life.

A common understanding is that the reputation of individuals is determined by others based on the information available to them. From an Information Science perspective, especially in relation to citation analysis, reputation can be thought of as a form of social esteem or symbolic capital (in the forms of reputational points or rewards) within individuals' communities (Baxter & Margavio, 2010, p. 132; Cronin & Shaw, 2002a, p. 1267; Cronin, 2001, p. 562). In addition, it is believed that all individuals have a reputation, which can be an essential part of individuals' identities (Origgi, 2012, pp. 399-418). It should be noted, however, that is it generally understood that the reputation of individuals *is determined by others based on the information available to them.* This information may be in the form of social capital and esteem, informational data and documents, or knowledge gained from personal experience or cultural understandings (Casare & Sichman, 2005; Origgi, 2012). Further, the reputational judgements may be altered based on the amount of time that has elapsed, changes in social conventions, or the trustworthiness of the information's source (Origgi, 2012, pp. 399-418).

Following these similar understandings of what comprises reputation (Baxter & Margavio, 2010; Casare & Sichman, 2005; Cronin & Shaw, 2002a; Morris, 1999; Origgi, 2012), it will be considered here as *the personal opinions and character judgements one individual has for another*.

1.3.3 Identity

Goffman famously likened personal identities to acting and the theatre in his 1959 book *The presentation of self in everyday life* (Goffman, 1959). In an online world, we are given many more opportunities to act – often with the safety of anonymity behind us – thus creating an online world filled with more identities than people. Opportunities to create multiple identities online, without the need to reveal one's "real self", has made it possible for individuals to further develop their sense of self through online communications (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 103).

Goffman suggested that there are two extremes to the way an individual presents themselves to others. One is that the "performer" is taken in by their own performance, believing their presented self is "real reality". The other extreme is where the performer is completely unconvinced by their own performance and becomes cynical. It is likely that one individual may slide back-and-forth between these extremes as they continue to create their identities (Goffman, 1959).

In recent years, much of the debate has focused on personal identity and how it changes over time (Noonan & Curtis, 2014, p. 1). Within the domain of Information Science, some of these discussions explore identity creation through citation practices, and how identity is not necessarily created by the individual that the identity represents (for example, Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Hyland, 2012). Increasingly, there are also debates about how many identities or personas one individual has or should have, and whether or not individuals should be required to use their "real name" when participating in online communities (Boyd, 2012; Duguay, 2014; Goodman, Cherubini, & Waldhorn, 2013; van Dijck, 2013).

For the purpose of this research, identity is broadly understood as *the "representations of self/selves" that individuals create for or about themselves*. These identities may be the portrayal of a single aspect of individuals' "real" personae (e.g. professional vs private selves; the athletic versus the creative selves), the portrayal of virtual or strictly online selves (e.g. fantasy profiles or profiles created with no intentional connection to an individual's "real" self), or even the portrayal of anonymous or pseudonymous identities created to mask individuals' real names whilst still portraying aspects of their real selves. This broad understanding has been arrived at on the basis of the work of Goffman, Bullingham and Vasconcelos, Rodogno, Uski and Lampinen, van Dijck, and others consulted over the course of this study in preparation of this thesis (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Goffman, 1959; Rodogno, 2011; Uski & Lampinen, 2014; van Dijck, 2013).

1.3.4 The "real world"

Whilst the idea that online and offline worlds have merged to create a "real world" is now broadly accepted, there is not always a consensus on how or why the amalgamation happens. For example, Hongladarom (2011, p. 534) argues that the blurring between online and offline environments occurs as individuals project themselves onto social media and social networking sites. He further suggests that there is essentially no difference between individuals' online and offline selves because of this, thus causing them to merge into one "real world".

Whether or not individuals are deliberately blending their online and offline worlds, it is becoming increasingly evident that blurring is taking place. In fact, the blurring of individuals' online and offline worlds has been further investigated as part of the UK government's report on the future of identities within the United Kingdom. The report suggests that "hyper-connectivity" is already removing any "meaningful" distinctions between the two worlds. It also suggests that the lines between personal and professional lives within both online and offline worlds are beginning to "blur" (The Government Office for Science, 2013, pp. 48-51).

The blurring between personal and professional lives has been researched from an employment and human resource perspective in recent years (e.g. Fieseler et al., 2014; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013). This includes a focus on merging of personal and professional lives and the blurring between online and offline worlds. There are disagreements, however, as to how intentional the blurring is for some individuals. For example, the differing views of van Dijck on one side of the argument and Fieseler, Christian, and Meckel on the other (Fieseler et al., 2014; van Dijck, 2013).

Whether individuals maintain separate personal and professional profiles or merge them together, the argument has been made from a professional viewpoint that an online presence is imperative for a company's success as well as professionals' opportunities for advancement and connections (Causer, 2009; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Madera, 2012; Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2010). Fertik and Thompson (2010, pp. 31-32) suggest that a company without a

Google trail may be viewed as "fraudulent"[2], and that individuals claiming to be leaders in their fields may be questioned if there are no trade journal articles about their achievements. Professional image consultants have made similar arguments in blog posts. They urge individuals to maintain up-to-date profiles on professional networking sites such as LinkedIn to ensure they are best positioned for advancement or other professional opportunities (Jacobs, 2013).

[2] The concept of fraud in this context relates to professional dishonestly such as claiming false or inaccurate accomplishments or skillsets, but is not necessarily related to criminal deception or illegal activities.

Term	Broad definitions	Basis for definition
Information	Any "object" that can be accessed and viewed online	From Buckland's concept of "information-as-thing" (Buckland, 1991, pp. 351-360)
Reputation	The personal opinions and character judgements one individual has for another	Based on the works of Casare and Sichman, (2005), Morris (1999), and Origgi (2012)
Identity	The representations of self/selves that individuals create for or about themselves	Based on the works of Goffman (1959), Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013), Rodogno (2011), Uski and Lampinen (2014), and Van Dijck (2013)
Persona	An aspect of identity that is constructed or presented to showcase aspects of an individual's overall identity	Based on the works of Goffman (1959), Barbour & Marshall (2012), and Marshall (2014)
Social media	Computer-mediated communication technologies, typically used to connect people with one another, as well as to produce and share user-generated content. Typically, these include social networking and microblogging sites, wikis, forums, and blogs	(Osatuyi, 2013, p. 2622)
Social networking platform	Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct profiles within the system, (2) view lists of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and the connections of others within the system	(Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211)

Table 1: Terms and definitions related to this doctoral investigation

For the purpose of this doctoral investigation, social networking platforms are considered to be a subset of social media platforms. Their relationship within the wider space on the Internet and the World Wide Web are captured in Figure 1 below.

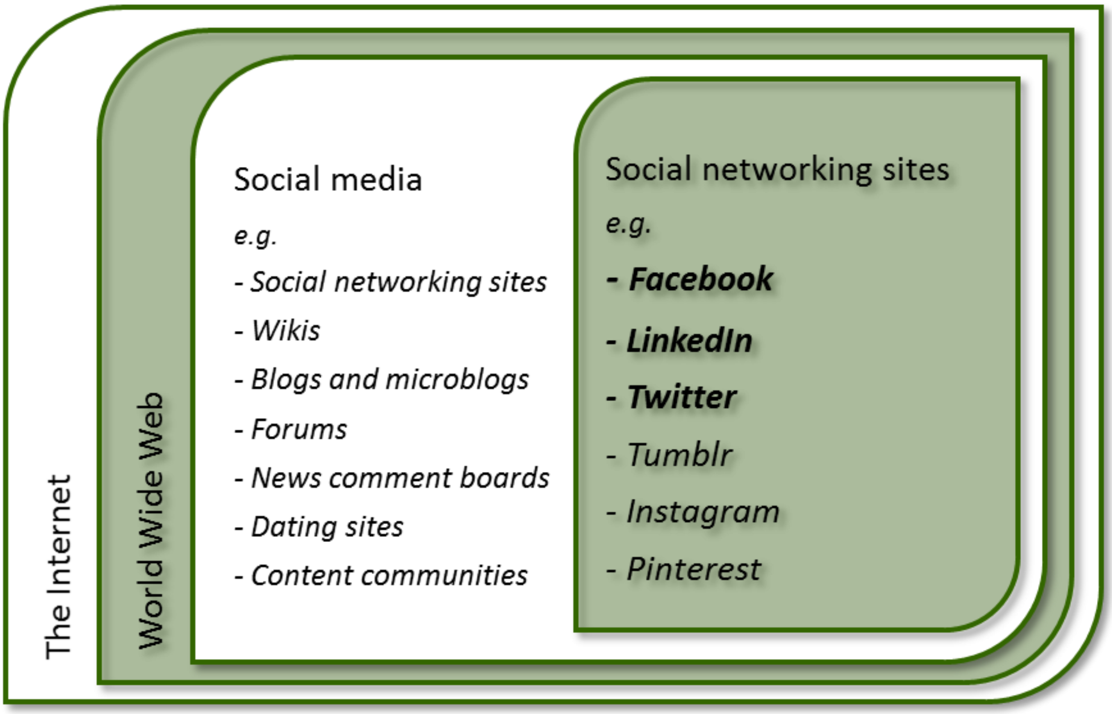

Figure 1: Situating social media platforms and social networking platforms within the Internet and the World Wide Web

1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis is presented across eight chapters, including this introduction. The remaining seven chapters are as follows:

- **Chapter 2, Literature review:** This chapter presents an overview of research related to online information and the building, management, and evaluation of personal reputations across a range of disciplines.
- **Chapter 3, Methodology:** A description of the qualitative methodological approach used for this doctoral investigation.
- **Chapter 4, Information practices used to build identity online:** The findings of the analysis and interpretation of data for the first of four research questions, “How do individuals use information to build identities for themselves online?”
- **Chapter 5, The use of online information to build and manage reputation:** The findings of the analysis and interpretation of data for the second of four research questions, “How do individuals use online information to build and manage their reputations?”
- **Chapter 6, The evaluation of reputation on the basis of online information:** The findings of the analysis and interpretation of data for the third of four research questions, “How do individuals evaluate the reputations of others based on the information available to them online?”
- **Chapter 7, Discussion:** A discussion of the findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, addressed in respect to the fourth and final research question, “How do information behaviours related to reputation building, management, and evaluation on social media reflect similar citation practices related to the building, management, and evaluation of academic reputation?”, as well as the two overarching research themes of this study and the findings of the literature review.
- **Chapter 8, Conclusion:** A statement of the main contributions of this work and the conclusions derived from it, and recommendations for future work to be conducted in academia.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of research related to online information and the building, management, and evaluation of personal reputations across a range of disciplines. It also introduces the framework that was used to design the methods used to collect the empirical data that is presented in this thesis. It is organised in four sections. These are:

(1) **Literature related to building and managing academic reputation** (section 2.2), including citation practices and bibliometrics;
(2) **Literature related to online information and reputation** (section 2.3) from a range of academic disciplines and non-academic sources;
(3) **Literature related to building and managing academic reputation through "alternative means"** (section 2.4), including the use of "altmetrics" and social media; and
(4) **The theoretical framework developed and used in this study** (section 2.5), including an outline of the gaps in the extant literature and the research questions that are being investigated.

This research is situated within the domain of Information Science, where literature related to everyday human information behaviour and use, information evaluation, and the use of citations (especially in the context of academic reputations), is considered in relationship to the building, management, and evaluation of reputation. The interdisciplinary nature of the two research themes (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1) being investigated for this study means that much of the relevant academic literature is dispersed across a number of other subject domains in addition to Information Science. Consequently, articles from a range of disciplines have contributed to the body of work included in this literature review. These include 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.

A wider examination of non-academic sources (e.g. current news stories and reported trends in social media use) was also undertaken. This helped to confirm that topics related to information practices and personal reputation management are of interest to a range of professionals including those working in human resources and reputation management, social media practitioners and platform owners, and managers of online platforms and social networking sites.

Relevant material for this literature review was accessed for review from a range of search services, databases, and search engines. These include commercial services such as the ACM Digital Library, IEEE Xplore, ScienceDirect, Sage Journals Online, SpringerLink, Web of Science, and the Wiley Online Library. In addition, Google news alerts and RSS feeds were used to find news articles, blog posts, and discussions from online platforms and community users. Further, overview information on citation analysis and the Science Citation Index was gathered from *The Web of knowledge: A festschrift in honor of Eugene Garfield* (Wouters, 2010).

The key search terms used to identify the initial materials for this review were “reputation”, “identity”, “online information”, and “citation analysis”. The deployment of a secondary set of search terms helped identify further material pertinent to the core themes of reputation, identity, online information, and citation analysis. A secondary set of terms, “anonymity”, “privacy”, “pseudonym”, “social capital”, and “trust”, frequently appear as keywords and index terms in studies that make reference to how people build reputation and identity using online information sources.

Definitions for the three “key concepts” (information, reputation, and identity) that helped to underpin the literature search can be found in Chapter 1, Section 1.3.

2.2 Literature related to building and managing academic reputations

There is a large body of research on the role that information plays in the building and management of the *academic* identities and reputations of individuals in general, e.g. that on citation practices (Cronin, 1985; White, 2001). The field of citation analysis was established with Eugene Garfield’s creation of the *Science Citation Index* in the 1950s. This citation index created a bibliographic system that catalogued and cross-referenced all cited papers and authors, allowing academics to quickly check for the number of citations a paper or another author received (Lederberg, 2010, pp. 26-27). This way of indexing means that materials are sometimes brought together where they would not have been without the index, leading Lederberg to argue that it could be best described as an "association-of-ideas index" (Lederberg, 2010, p. 27). Since the citation index came into use, citations have been investigated for their use as an information retrieval tool (Cronin & Atkins, 2000, p. 1). These citation index tools can be used as ways to systematically measure, create, consider, and investigate the identities and reputations of researchers[3]. They may also to help researchers increase their visibility among their peers (Cronin, 1985, pp. 3-4).

Citations can help to build a researcher's own identity and reputation as well as the identity and reputations of others. These citations can impact both the *researchers giving the citation ("citers")* and the *researchers receiving the citation ("citees")*. In addition to the impact on individual researchers, the same citations may impact the overall reputation of entities such as academic and research institutions, and journals or other publications.

This section considers literature that addresses the relationship between citations and academic reputation as it relates to:

(1) The impact a citation has on academic identity and reputation;
(2) The impact of citations on the citing author's identity and reputation;
(3) The impact of citations on the identity and reputation of the cited author; and
(4) The impact of a citation on institutions and publications.

2.2.1 The impact of citations on identity and reputation

Citations can be considered records of intellectual "debts" (in that they convey a form of acknowledgement or "payment") between one researcher to another, acting as a currency in the form of scholarly influence (Baldi, 1998, p. 830; Cronin & Atkins, 2010, p. 3; Harwood, 2009, p. 504). These debts, and the influence they convey, can then act as a form of symbolic capital in a research marketplace as they help to increase

[3] Though research is usually performed by academics at higher education institutions, there are also active researchers in non-academic environments such as commercial or government laboratories or research institutes.

researchers' overall citation counts (Cronin & Atkins, 2000, p. 4; Cronin, 1998, pp. 48-51). As a unit of information, a single citation can impact multiple entities simultaneously because the debt or "social capital" it provides helps to build identity and reputation for all parties. This also means that citations, as units of information, can also serve to tie individuals, institutions, and publications together.

When authors cite the works of others in their papers, the citations can help to build identity and reputation for all parties concerned. *Citers'* identities and reputations are built by aligning themselves with the *citees* as well as with specific fields of study (Small, 2010, p. 451). Citers are thought to be conveying trust in the citees by suggesting that they assign credibility to the work and evidence that is being presented in the cited papers. This trust is of even higher standard if the cited paper is published in a journal with high standards and rigorous peer review processes (Davenport & Cronin, 2010, p. 521). Importantly, citers also become "image-makers" for citees, even though it has been pointed out that citers are not generally doing so with an intentional plan to build someone's image (Cronin & Shaw, 2002b, p. 31). However, it is not uncommon for a citation to be provided where there is *not* an assignment of credibility to or alignment with another academic. For example, when a paper is cited to show a disagreement with the author or to be critical of the work (Harwood, 2009, pp. 497-518).

At the same time, citations can have an impact on the *institutions or fields of study* related to both the citers and the citees by creating alignments or connections between them (Small, 2010). Further, the citations may have an impact on the publications in which the articles are placed, as well as on other publications cited in the article. It is also worth mentioning that once trust has been established for the citees, other authors cited in the same article are assumed trustworthy, as are citees in *the article that was cited* (Davenport & Cronin, 2010, p. 522), essentially creating a chain of trusted authors.

In addition to citations provided by citers referencing a researcher's work directly, providing them co-authorships on publications can also lead to an increase in citations. Co-authorships might be provided because authors are included in the writing the paper, the review process, or both. However, in some cases co-authors can be included without the named co-authors having any direct involvement in writing or reviewing a paper. These are sometimes referred to as "gift" authorships and hold the potential for future citations, regardless of the level of contribution made to the article (Cronin, Shaw, & La Barre, 2003, p. 856; Cronin, 1998, p. 49, 2001b, p. 563) and are discussed in Section 2.2.2 below. Conversely, some researchers provide "ghost" authorships whereby they have some level of input in the writing or reviewing of an article, yet do not receive formal acknowledgement (Cronin et al., 2003, p. 160; Cronin, Shaw, & La Barre, 2004, p. 856; Cronin, 2001b, p. 563).

2.2.2 The impact of citations on the citing author's identity and reputation

Citations play an important part in the building of researchers' own identities and reputations. This can happen by aligning the citers with the citees, by providing a gesture of goodwill to more senior researchers, such as a supervisor or a senior academic, or by aligning the citers within a specific field or domain (Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Ding, Liu, Guo, & Cronin, 2013; Harwood, 2009; Hyland, 2003). Harwood and Petrić (2012) have noted that this process can happen early in an academic's studies, with citing certain researchers so that they give a "favourable impression" to the individual marking their coursework. White (2001, pp. 88-89) states that the citees become a part of the citing authors' identities over time, further strengthening the alignment between the authors.

Self-citation is another way in which researchers can build upon their own reputations. This is referred to by White (2001, p. 93) as the "core of the core" of a researcher's identity. Whilst self-citation can be thought of as "egocentric" by some (White, 2001, pp. 102-103), it is more often used as a way to build upon or make connections to previous work, further building the authors' identities and reputations (Bonzi & Snyder, 1991, pp. 245-254; Costas, van Leeuwen, & Bordons, 2010, p. 536).

In addition to citations, citers may align themselves with other researchers by providing co-authorships or acknowledgments. In addition to building academic identity, these "gifts" from one researcher to another may help to build a stronger academic reputation (Cronin, 1998, pp. 48-49; McCain, 2018, p. 606). Gifts may also be presented in the form of co-authorship or an “honorary” co-authorship, where a researcher receives some credit for a publication despite having little or no input into it, in part to fulfil social protocols (Bordons & Gómez, 2010, p. 199-200; Cronin, Shaw, & La Barre, 2003, p. 856; Cronin, 2001, p. 563).

Beyond simply “gifting” citations and co-authorships, citers may opt to actively collaborate with those whom they feel will benefit their reputation (Bordons & Gómez, 2010, p. 200; Cronin & Shaw, 2007, p. 224). Cronin, Shaw, and La Barre (2003, p. 855) also suggest that co-authored papers carry a higher return in terms of symbolic capital than single-authored papers, thereby making the act of co-authorship even more vital for those wishing to garner higher citation counts, which may aid in the overall building of research-related identity and reputation.

At the same time, the growth of co-authored papers has given rise to questions and concerns over who contributed to the study (Sugimoto & Cronin, 2012b). This has led to calls for changes in editorial guidelines (Cronin, 2001b, p. 558; Sugimoto & Cronin, 2012b, p. 451) and as well as the tagging or categorisation of each author’s contribution to a paper (Davenport & Cronin, 2001, pp. 770-773) in an effort to remove concerns about fraudulent or dishonest citation practices (Cronin, 2001b). The quantitative nature of these studies does not allow for definitive understandings of the degree of the relationships between authors. However, it has been argued that future work using ethnographic techniques may result in clarifying some of the social motivations behind co-authorship (Sugimoto & Cronin, 2012b, pp. 466-467).

These acts of alignment are especially important in the building of one’s own reputation and future citations, as it has been argued that some individuals will determine whether or not to read a specific cited paper on the basis of familiarity with its author(s) (Cole, 2010, p. 111). However, this can also lead to questions about the authenticity of a citation as individuals may cite specific authors to align themselves with leaders in the field, sometimes through biased citing (MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 2007, p. 343), or to gain placement in specific journals by flattering potential editors or peer reviewers (Sugimoto & Cronin, 2013, pp. 851-854). It might also be the case that they want to be associated with a specific researcher/authority figure, or that they want to be seen as relevant within the field as a whole. Further, the citation of materials from specific journals might be made as a way of indicating that they are following the top-rated journals in the field. This could also be said for the alignment with researchers from well-perceived institutions (Narin, Hamilton, & Olivastro, 2010, pp. 344-346).

2.2.3 The impact of citations on the identity and reputation of the cited author

Some of the activities that researchers undertake to assemble/create their own identity and reputation can have an impact on the identity or reputation of others, as well. For example, when citers reference other researchers, they are not only aligning themselves with the other authors but they are also providing the citee with an additional citation which will then serve to bolster both individuals' overall citation counts, increasing their placement in citation ranking indexes.

For citees, these citations can help to build an overall citation identity as a respected researcher – especially if the citer is also well-respected – leading to future citations. If those future citers are also respected figures, there is further positive impact to both the citer and citee. As White (2001, p. 106) points out: "Recitation by one respected figure is good; recitation by many respected figures is better; recitation by hundreds of respected figures is world fame".

Citees also benefit from instances where citations are given with the hope or anticipation of reciprocity – individuals citing another author with the implication of a returned citation at another date – or of junior researchers "citing upwards" – even though they may not be cited in return (Cronin & Shaw, 2002, p. 44). A similar practice is noted in the addition of "acknowledgments" by one researcher to another either for explicit assistance or for inspiration (Cronin, 1998; MacRoberts & MacRoberts, 2007).

Because some of these citation practices may appear to be based on identity or reputation building, Cronin (2001, p. 4) points out that critics have challenged the assumption that citations can be used to indicate quality or even impact. Whilst it is generally understood that the number of times a paper is cited provides a certain suggestion as to the level of influence a paper has in a field (Ding, Liu, Guo, & Cronin, 2013, p. 591) there are no guarantees as to the quality of the cited paper (Ding & Cronin, 2011). These questions of information quality do not necessarily stand to undermine the relevance of the citation however, as someone who is considered to be highly relevant in a field will be cited and recited, bringing them and their ideas even further respect within the field (White, 2001, pp. 103-106). It is still possible, however, that questions of information quality can impact an individual's identity or reputation.

2.2.4 The impact of a citation on the reputations of institutions and publications

Identity and reputation are not only about the information shared and alignments with other researchers. In many cases, decisions of *where* information is shared can be strong indicators for the identity or reputation that individuals wish to convey. This can be witnessed in researchers' use of journal rankings to determine publication outlets. These practices will be discussed below.

Publishing in research journals that are highly regarded, or those with a high impact factor, in the field is deemed to be of greater reputational impact than publishing in those with lower impact factors or those outside of one's main discipline (Sugimoto, Larivière, Ni, & Cronin, 2013, pp. 898-904; Vinkler, 2010, p. 170). Equally, the regularity in which one publishes is vital in research environments which suggests that academics must "publish or perish" (Lupton, 2014, p. 27).

Because of this, there are sometimes questions about coercive tactics in citation practices where an editor, reviewer, or publisher pressures authors into citing specific authors or papers in order to have their papers published (Goffman, 1959; Sugimoto & Cronin, 2013; Wilhite & Fong, 2012). These practices may increase a journal's impact factor, which is used in the determination of a publication's reputation within a given discipline. These coercive tactics may also lead to a paper being more heavily cited – increasing the citation count for the coerced citing author in the process (Sugimoto & Cronin, 2013, pp. 852-853).

These studies of citation analysis from an Information Science viewpoint tells us that there are clear and deliberate practices undertaken by researchers in the building of identity and reputation. Further, there is a growing body of evidence that suggests some of these identity and reputation building practices are now also taking place through social media use by researchers and research institutions, as discussed in Section 2.4 below.

Outside of academia, reputation is researched across a wide range of disciplines. These are discussed in the next section in reference to how reputations are built, managed, and evaluated through online information shared on social networking sites.

2.3 Literature related to online information and reputation

Looking beyond academic reputations and citation analysis, there is a wide range of academic disciplines investigating online information and reputation. This is in part because there is a general understanding that information plays an important role in the determination of individuals' reputations, regardless of who creates and shares the information (Ausloos, 2012; Finocchiaro & Ricci, 2013; Origgi, 2012; Osatuyi, 2013; Tsikerdekis & Zeadally, 2014; Walther, van der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). It is also commonly understood that social networking sites and social media generally depend on the act of sharing information – whether that is sharing personal details for registration purposes or sharing online content in the form of personal stories, thoughts, and images with others. These pieces of information can be used to build, manage, and evaluate personal reputations.

It has been argued that an individual's level of digital literacy may play a vital role in the amount and type of online information they share (Park, 2011; Sayyad Abdi & Bruce, 2015; The Government Office for Science, 2013). However, Furnell (2010, pp. 42-46) suggests that individuals share details about themselves online without thinking beyond their own intentions, and without considering the potential misuse of the shared information and data. He further argues that some individuals may share personal information with an expanding network of people they may not know or trust by inviting them to connect via social networking sites.

This section considers literature that addresses the information that individuals share online and its relationship to reputation and identity as it relates to:

(1) Naming conventions and online identity creation;
(2) Presenting different aspects of identity;
(3) The creation of "personal brands";
(4) Human resources management and employment;
(5) Information privacy, ownership, and longevity;
(6) The quality and accuracy of information; and
(7) Online connections.

2.3.1 Naming conventions and online identity creation

A key debate around the online activities of individuals is that of online identity. This is because these identities can alter the way in which information about individuals is attributed to them. As online users demand certain levels of anonymity as a way to protect their privacy (Chen, Chen, Lo, & Yang, 2008; Martin, Rice, & Martin, 2016), some online communities and platforms have started to question the suitability of pseudonyms and anonymity (McDonald, 2013; Siegal, 2013). This conflict, sometimes referred to as the "nymwars",[4] is debated by social media advocates and researchers.

There are also on-going debates led by researchers, journalists, social media companies and organisations, and users of online communities about the number of identities that one individual should have, and if any of those identities should be anonymous or not (Alpár, Hoepman, & Siljee, 2011; Boyd, 2012; Christopherson, 2007; Goodman et al., 2013; Qian & Scott, 2007; van Dijck, 2013; van Zoonen, 2013). Indeed, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has argued that having more than one identity shows a lack of integrity and stated that:

[4] *Collins Dictionaries: nymwar*. (n.d.). "A dispute about the right to publish material on the internet under a fictitious name"; a portmanteau word combining "pseudonym" and "wars". Retrieved 1 August 2018 from http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/nym-war.

> You have one identity. The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly … Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 199).

This is the sentiment behind Facebook's "real name" policy[5] that states users of the social networking site must register using authentic identities. Similarly, when Google+ launched in 2011 it required users to register using real names. Google's chairman Eric Schmidt explained that it was important to do so because Google+ had the intentions of becoming an online identity service (Boyd, 2012, p. 29).

In the case of Google, public outcry and community resistance meant that it eventually allowed users to register with pseudonyms (Boyd, 2012, pp. 29-30). However, the debate over real names remains a contentious topic for Facebook. Accounts are still actively suspended for violations of the network's name policy, despite assurance from Facebook that the policy to address the needs of members from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer communities (LGBTQ+) will be created[6]. Owners of blogs and news sites have also started to require individuals who post comments on stories to use their real names. For example, in late-2013 *The Huffington Post* implemented a "real name" policy requiring commenters on the website to refrain from using pseudonyms to post, with the site's founder, Arianna Huffington, arguing that doing so would create a higher level of civility and accountability (McDonald, 2013).

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[5] This is the commonly used phrase for Facebook's naming policy, however requirement is for the use of "authentic identities", or the name individuals use in "real life". There is no requirement for using legal names, but users must be able to provide acceptable identification forms for the name they use if requested. (Facebook. (n.d.). What names are allowed on Facebook? *Facebook.com*. Retrieved 1 August 2018, from https://www.facebook.com/help/112146705538576.)

[6] Facebook began suspending the accounts of some members from the LGBTQ community when it emerged they were using pseudonyms or, in the case of some drag queens, stage names. A community backlash led to Facebook officials assurance that a new policy would be created to allow for more flexibility (http://online.wsj.com/articles/facebook-changes-real-name-policy-after-uproar-from-drag-queens-1412223040). Statement from Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/chris.cox/posts/10101301777354543.

At the same time, The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers concluded that the debate surrounding the use of real names versus allowing users to remain anonymous is contentious, with no consensus on the matter. However, many organisations believe the ability to post anonymously provides options for those who are unable to speak freely on a topic (Goodman, Cherubini, & Waldhorn, 2013, p. 7). Further, public backlash to such policies has meant that many former commenters are no longer participating on the site, according The Poynter Institute, because they are no longer able to post anonymously when discussing sensitive topics (Kirkland, 2014).

These real name policies are also challenged by van Dijck (2013, pp. 199-215) who argues that the idea that individuals should only have one “authentic or true” identity “plays into the hands of agencies and governments who want to control an individual’s conduct”, as well as being fundamentally inconsistent with everyday behaviours. She also argues that since Goffman’s seminal work on the presentation of self (Goffman, 1959), the display of different personalities and identities has become a socially acceptable and understood norm. However, she states that individuals may present themselves with “one identity” on a social media platform, but that they will present themselves differently on separate platforms. She argues that individuals present a more professional self on one platform and a more private self on another. Despite this, van Dijck concedes that the owners of social networking platforms would likely prefer their users to present a “uniformed persona” as that provides more clear and coherent information for their own data collection purposes.

In a similar manner, Boyd (2011) contests that “‘real names’ policies aren’t empowering; they’re an authoritarian assertion of power over vulnerable people”. These issues are discussed across a range of academic disciples that focus on, for example, medical and mental health (Greidanus & Everall, 2010; Mesch & Beker, 2010), sexual or gender identities and socially stigmatised activities (Duguay, 2014; Kozhan, 2011; Lingel & Boyd, 2013; Marciano, 2014), and employment (Labrecque et al., 2011; Rodogno, 2011; Tsikerdekis & Zeadally, 2014). Equally, it has been pointed out that anonymity can provide protection for teachers who wish to remain hidden from their students, as well as workers, and potential whistle-blowers, who fear reprisal from co-workers or employers for voicing concerns over labour practices

(Christopherson, 2007; Vaast, 2007). From the community viewpoint, there are also many arguments for the use of pseudonyms or anonymity. People who are at risk, celebrities or others with stage names or public identities different from their "real" identity, individuals who have names that are outside of traditional Western naming practices, and those with long-established nicknames or online pseudonyms would welcome this[7].

Mental health professionals Greidanus and Everall (2010, pp. 191-204) have argued the benefits of pseudonyms and anonymity online, noting that such "cloaking" allows for vulnerable people to gain access to information without the fear of stigma. They discuss the ways in which anonymity provides a feeling of safety when attempting to access health-related information, especially as it relates to suicide-prevention. The ability to remain anonymous can help adolescents gain confidence through the control they have in deciding what to share and with whom – trusting that they are doing so in confidence.

Anonymous accounts or pseudonyms may also play a role in keeping people informed – and in some cases safe – when attempting to access information about behaviours and beliefs that are considered to be outside social norms (Harviainen, 2014; Lingel & Boyd, 2013). In the case of those seeking or sharing information on extreme body modification, for example, individuals may need to obscure their identity for fear of criticism and social stigma, or because some procedures may be illegal and unsafe. Followers of such fringe practices work to ensure the continued availability of information by protecting the identities of group members (Lingel & Boyd, 2013, pp. 981-991).

This view has also been discussed in an article by Kozhan (2011, pp. 275-278) who states that blogs "give voices to those who would otherwise not be heard". She argues that for courtesan bloggers (those who blog about their lives as paid escorts) the medium allows users to express themselves and freely speak their minds. However,

[7] As part of the "My name is me" campaign started during a key point in the nymwars, advocacy groups around the Web created lists of reasons individuals might need to use pseudonyms. A partial list of those affected by "real name" policies can be found here: http://mynameisme.org/about.

those courtesans who use the platform for advertising must further balance their anonymity with their physical selves. Similarly, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013, pp. 103-104) have argued that the anonymity adopted by "sex bloggers", and by bloggers writing about political or other potentially contentious views, allows them to write "with total abandon". However, they caution that upon a blogger's real identity being discovered, individuals may be forced to reveal their offline identities. They cite courtesan blogger Belle de Jour[8] and political blogger Nightjack[9] as examples.

For bloggers who share stories of their medical or mental conditions, the levels of self-disclosure vary greatly. Bloggers may choose to be anonymous, to use a pseudonym, or to remain identifiable. However, it is argued that some bloggers who are not *strictly* anonymous still expect a certain level of anonymity based purely on the Internet's virtual nature and an individual's ability to "hide in plain sight" (Bronstein, 2013, pp. 161-181). Similarly, "networked anonymity" platforms and online discussion forums provide individuals to share anonymous communications "freely and honestly" without having to maintain a blog (Maltby, Thornham, & Bennett, 2018; Sharon & John, 2018). Yue, Kan, Xiaomeng, and Zhen (2010, pp. 71-76) state that, when compared to non-bloggers, individuals' overall self-identities can be built in part by blogging, due to the act of self-reflection and interaction that the activity allows. Additionally, bloggers may have the opportunity to experiment with different personality traits which may help to form individuals' online and offline identities. They are also afforded more opportunities to compare themselves with others than non-bloggers. This arguably may allow them to form a more objective perception of their physical selves.

Researchers who investigate the development of identity in adolescents have published similar findings about the role of social media use and the concept of identity, noting that participation on social networking sites allows young people to actively explore their identities and can enhance "identity formation and production"

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[8] Brooke Magnanti was named as Belle de Jour (https://belledejour-uk.blogspot.com) in 2009.
[9] Richard Horton named as Nightjack in 2012 and has since deleted his blog (originally located at http://nightjack.wordpress.com).

(Hinduja & Patchin, 2008, pp. 125-146). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the autonomy associated with anonymity allows individuals to “experiment with some new behaviours without fear of condemnation” (Pedersen, 1997, p. 152). It has also been argued that anonymity allows users to avoid sharing certain aspects of their lives with certain groups of people. From hiding religious views or sexual orientation from work colleagues to hiding hobbies from family or friends who might not understand, anonymity can be a security some people need. The argument that false identities leads to cyberbullying is often countered with the safety it provides from those who do not wish to be bullied (Clear, 2014).

Importantly, the use of pseudonyms is not always about anonymity. Indeed, a desire to hide behind anonymity in one platform does not necessarily mean a desire to hide everywhere. For example, some individuals might be happy to share certain aspects of their lives with connections through social networking sites where they are in control over who sees the information, whilst not wishing to share the same information in a public forum (Chen et al., 2008). Additionally, they may not wish for that same information to be given or sold to other organisations for marketing or other data gathering uses – with or without permission (Carmagnola, Osborne, & Torre, 2013, pp. 14-15).

Boyd (2012) argues that pseudonyms have become a commonly used form of identity online, and in some cases enjoy a stronger identity marker than an individual’s physical self, despite the on-going calls for the use of “real names”. Further, the ability of individuals to use information to project different aspects of their personal and professional lives means that individuals can portray altered versions of their personality for different groups – especially when communicating online. This can be achieved with or without the perceived protection of anonymity (Labrecque et al., 2011; Marciano, 2014; Mesch & Beker, 2010; van Zoonen, 2013). Because of this ability to create and project different online identities, some individuals have created or managed multiple online identities in an effort to protect, enhance, or even defend their offline or real-world reputations (Emanuel et al., 2014; van Dijck, 2013; van Zoonen, 2013).

2.3.2 Presenting different aspects of identity

Some individuals use naming conventions and information sharing practices in different ways to showcase aspects of their identity (which, in turn, has a bearing on their reputation). These practices depend on perceptions of audience, the technology platforms in question, and the anticipated impact of any information shared (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Lingel & Boyd, 2013; Lund, 2012; Marder, Joinson, Shankar, & Thirlaway, 2016; Rui & Stefanone, 2013; Wessels, 2012; Yang, Quan-haase, Nevin, & Chen, 2017; Zhong, Chan, Karamshuk, Lee, & Sastry, 2017). This extant literature often recalls the earlier work of Goffman (1959) and his explorations of "front of house" and "back of house" presentations of the self in offline environments, prompting debate around the question of individual online authenticity. For example, Uski and Lampinen (2014) argue that although social norms vary from platform to platform, greater efforts are made online to use information to present an authentic version of the self than is the case in face-to-face interactions. However, others suggest that individuals will experiment with pseudonyms and anonymous accounts (which may or may not be linked back to real names later) (Vaast, 2007; van Dijck, 2013), and that they deliberately obscure or omit information in profile settings to make it difficult for undesired connections to find accounts (Labrecque et al., 2011; Qian & Scott, 2007; Uski & Lampinen, 2014). It is further argued that the deployment of professional personas to showcase specific aspects of an individual's identity is not uncommon (Fieseler et al., 2014; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Zhong et al., 2017).

Various techniques have been identified as important to the management of the information that contributes to the presentation of self, often addressing questions of boundary management (Fisher, Boland, & Lyytinen, 2016; Liang, Shen, & Fu, 2017; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Saker, 2017). For example, individuals will use particular platforms for the sharing of specific types of information to ensure that it is available to the desired audience for the information (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Lingel & Boyd, 2013; Lund, 2012; Millham & Atkin, 2018; Wessels, 2012; Yang et al., 2017). These types of information practices also include restricting the access of certain groups of connections by platform or privacy settings (Lupton, 2014a; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) and the careful management of privacy settings to limit the availability of information to others on a platform (Carmagnola et al., 2013; Das & Sahoo, 2011; Mesch & Beker, 2010). Information sharing techniques have also been identified in relationship to information censorship practices, for example in respect of sensitive topics such as mental health issues (Greidanus & Everall, 2010), extreme body modification (Lingel & Boyd, 2013), or due to the known or unknown audiences on a given platform (Child & Starcher, 2016; Duffy & Chan, 2018; Liang et al., 2017; Marder et al., 2016; Millham & Atkin, 2018; Steinfeld, 2015).

2.3.3 The creation of "personal brands"

Related to the idea of building an identity online is the idea of a "personal brand". Peters (1997) highlighted the importance of individuals selling themselves as vital commodities by thinking about how they used email signatures and personal "mission statements". Since then, the term has become commonplace when discussing online presence and information sharing practices for the purpose of building reputation (Harris & Rae, 2011; Karaduman, 2013; Labrecque et al., 2011) with Karaduman stating that "everyone has a personal brand" (Karaduman, 2013, p. 466).

Karaduman (2013, pp. 466-468) takes the argument further by asserting that it is not enough to just have the brand: individuals must proactively manage their reputations to make themselves distinguishable from others, whilst conforming to acceptable norms. He states that information posted on social media provides increasing opportunities for the management of personal brands, especially for top-level executives, and that having a social media presence is of high priority for managers and executives because of the opportunities it provides for new business-related connections. It should be noted, however, that these assertions are specific to work-related reputations and not specifically to "whole-life" reputations, or personal reputations that encompass all aspects of an individual's life (which is the focus of this research), despite being referred to as "personal brands".

Other researchers have investigated the casual use of social networking tools and how these tools can be used to create information that creates a personal brand or impact personal reputations, even if individuals are not intending this to be the outcome (Peters, 1997; Yang, 2015). When viewed by human resource professionals, online profiles might be misunderstood and evaluated in a negative light. This is especially true if the individual reviewing that profiles has a limited understanding of the social norms used on the site (Labrecque et al., 2011). Because of this, brand managers suggest reputation management strategies that encourage individuals to create content online as a way of highlighting their positive attributes and contributions in both their online and offline worlds (Fertik & Thompson, 2010, pp. 46-49; Mayfield, 2010, pp. 101-108). However, there does not appear to be evidence showing the impact these strategies have on personal reputation.

2.3.4 Human resources and employment

In recent years, the number of employers who conduct social media reviews on potential and current employees has increased (Harris & Rae, 2011). The phenomenon has been studied in employment and human resources research (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Fieseler et al., 2014; Foste & Botero, 2011; Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Labrecque et al., 2011; Madera, 2012; Roberts & Roach, 2008; Uski & Lampinen, 2014). This work discusses criteria that employers may use in the evaluation of potential employees, and the ways in which individuals may alter their online information behaviours for the purposes of employment.

In addition to reviews of an individual's social media activities to determine their suitability for employment, post-employment social media reviews may lead to the loss of employment (Carmagnola et al., 2013; Das & Sahoo, 2011; Lupton, 2014a; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Whilst many individuals view this merely as a *perceived* risk that is not applicable to their own circumstances (Carmagnola et al., 2013, p. 15) it has been argued that boundary management practices are important because "being able to create and maintain appropriate boundaries … are quickly becoming critical skills that most employees now need to master". This is especially true for individuals who unintentionally combine their personal and professional lives on social networking sites (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013, pp. 656-657).

2.3.5 Information privacy, ownership, and longevity

The potentially permanent nature of information on the Internet has created a need or desire amongst some to have information updated, notated, or completely removed. Indeed, the direction in law internationally is towards the strengthening of online privacy rights, for instance in the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK's Data Protection Act 2018. Even before these, it had been suggested that legislation such as the "right to be forgotten" can play a vital role in the protection of individuals' reputations. Such legislation would allow individuals to hide, or otherwise clean up, online information about themselves, allowing embarrassing or damaging information to be altered or access removed all together. However, this legislation puts the onus on individuals to be aware of the information found online about them, and to anticipate all of its future uses. Neither of these is practical in an information-based society (Ausloos, 2012, pp. 143-152).

This idea of protecting individuals' data through rights of oblivion or "the right to be forgotten" was discussed prior to the European Court of Justice's ruling in 2014[10] (European Commission, 2010). In fact, the Commission defined the concept in 2010 as "the right of individuals to have their data no longer processed and deleted when they are no longer needed for legitimate purposes" (European Commission, 2010, p. 8). When discussing the then proposed right to be forgotten, Ausloos (2012, pp. 143-152) reasoned that its scope would rely strongly on the way in which "personal data" was defined, and the consistent application of the definition. Additionally, he pointed out that as personal data is often outside of individuals' control, and that they often do not know the data exists, the issue of privacy through a right to be forgotten would be problematic.

It is not merely out-of-date or true-but-embarrassing data and information that has an impact on individuals' reputations. There are also issues of libel and defamation. These issues are sometimes heightened because of the immense speed at which information

[10] Ruling C-131/12, decided on 13 May 2014 by the European Court of Justice, known as "the right to be forgotten". Retrieved 05 September 2018 from http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document_print.jsf?doclang=EN&text&pageIndex=0&part=1&mode=DOC&docid=152065&occ=first&dir&cid=437838.

can be shared on the Internet (Dennis, 2013; Finocchiaro & Ricci, 2013). This has brought an increase in defamation lawsuits, and the number of strategic litigations against public participation (SLAPP) lawsuits in North America. These can sometimes be seen as forms of intimidation by the already powerful (Dennis, 2013, pp. 17-18).

Other factors also shape the propensity to share personal information. In a study investigating trust and the disclosure of identifiable information online, it was determined that the higher the level of trust in the requesting organisation or platform, the more information individuals would share. It was also determined that women were more likely to share information than men, and that the younger a user was, the more identifiable information they would share online (Mesch, 2012, pp. 1471-1477). However, a study into the online disclosure of personal information to government organisations found that individuals may be growing more aware of the risks. Participants in the study seemed concerned about their data being exploited by the organisation or sold to a third party as a tradable commodity (Beldad, van der Geest, de Jong, & Steehouder, 2012, pp. 41-49).

In Wessels’ (2012, pp. 1251-1268) investigation into identification and the practices of identity and privacy online, her student participants (aged 19-21) felt that individuals have different identities depending on their audiences and activities. Further, this group was aware of the overlaps between their online and offline environments, prompting several participants to note that they are careful about the disclosure of personal information to offline connections, for fear that it may be later shared online. Whilst Wessels’ investigation was concerned with the role of identification, she discovered that the students in her investigation felt that identity and privacy were more important than the identification of an individual. On the other hand, she discovered that the employed workers in her study (aged 35-65 years) were more concerned with their levels of privacy and how the identities they built could identify them.

2.3.6 The quality and accuracy of information

Information can be characterised as "either true or false" (Cherwitz & Hikins, 1988), however within the domain of human information behaviour and use it has been suggested that people find value in information even if it is known "not to be entirely true" (Case & Given, 2016). Budd (2011) suggests that, more than just the truthfulness or accuracy of the information, the context of the information is important to its overall interpretation, as discussed below.

The idea that the Internet has an ability to "remember" feeds into the notion that information can be used to construct individuals' reputations regardless of the accuracy or quality of the information (Ausloos, 2012; Carmagnola et al., 2013; Fertik & Thompson, 2010; Finocchiaro & Ricci, 2013; Labrecque et al., 2011; Lund, 2012; Rieh, 2002). This means that the Internet allows information to be communicated without confirming a source's trustworthiness, and out-dated, inaccurate, or false information can be easily spread, which could cause reputational damage. Further, individuals may have limited control over the information held about them, even when the information is being shared with their knowledge or consent (Finocchiaro & Ricci, 2013, pp. 289-292).

In the case of data-mining, separate pieces of data may be grouped together, linking two or more people as one single individual, even when other evidence may suggest that the information belongs to multiple individuals. Additionally, data can be linked together even when an individual is intentionally trying to keep two or more identities separate and un-linked (Finocchiaro & Ricci, 2013, pp. 294-295). Further, out-of-date information on individuals' personal profiles (Labrecque et al., 2011, p. 47) or government databases (Finocchiaro & Ricci, 2013, p. 291) can lead to misrepresentations of individuals' reputations, despite information having been accurate when it was first stored.

The information about individuals can have serious and long-lasting impacts on their reputations, especially if the information is incorrect or libellous. Finocchiaro and Ricci (2013, pp. 291-293) argue that false information can be even more damaging when communicated via the Internet rather than through conventional communication channels. This is because the Internet allows anyone to share information without checking the author's identity. Further, they question whether even true and accurate information can incorrectly reflect individuals' personal views and opinions, which can create inaccurate evaluations of their reputations.

Some postings may also later cause regret, especially when there is a perception of reputational damage because of the information shared. For example, Moore and McElroy's (2012, pp. 267-273) study of Facebook explored how people reflected upon their use of the social networking site. This found that most users felt some degree of regret after making posts later deemed inappropriate. The levels of regret varied depending on the level of perceived damage. It was proposed that posting too much personal information overall could lead to a greater level of regret and – in extreme circumstances – cause users to cancel their accounts. This idea of "oversharing" can also lead to negative reputation evaluations, even in the case when the individuals in question do not regret their level of sharing (Bernstein, 2013; CNN Living Staff, 2013).

In some cases, individuals may share information online without a full understanding of the impacts of their disclosure. Suler (2004, pp. 321-326) coined the phrase "online disinhibition effect" to explain how some individuals might act out more frequently or intensely in their online environments than they would offline because they are unaware of the connection between the two environments. He argues that some individuals may feel protected by the "invisibility" of online environments and the use of pseudonyms or anonymous accounts. However, he also suggests that there is still a risk that information shared with the intent of invisibility might still impact an individual's offline environments, despite their intentions to keep their online and offline lives separate. This unintentional or uninformed way of information sharing can impact the personal management of individuals' reputation, especially in relation to discussions about "data mining" and the combination of data that may (or may not) refer to the same individual (Davis, 2012; Furnell, 2010; Osatuyi, 2013; van Dijck, 2013).

This lack of a full understanding of how online information can impact reputation has been noted by Solove (2007, pp. 1-13), who questions the control that individuals have over their reputations when others have the ability to share information about them online. Solove also suggests that the Internet's ability to "recall" information means that there is a possibility for information to re-surface once it has been "forgotten". Here, he argues that negative or embarrassing information can have a long-lasting impact on an individual's reputation online and offline, and that they may have limited opportunities to reverse the situation.

2.3.7 Online connections

The notion of being known by the "company you keep" has been considered since ancient times, found in both biblical passages and Aesop's fables (Aesop, n.d.; Proverbs 13:20 Revised New Jerusalem Bible). In the age of social media and social networking sites, the "company you keep" can be considered as the people individuals are connected to, which can also include their connections' connections. Accordingly, it has been recognised that social networking platforms can break down some of the barriers between social groups formed offline. This gives individuals access to diverse groups of contacts (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Carmagnola et al., 2013; Das & Sahoo, 2011; Harris & Rae, 2011; Qi & Edgar-Nevill, 2011). As a result, individuals may have to share an online social space with people who would ordinarily be kept separate, such as family, friends, and co-workers.

Whilst this phenomenon may have an impact on how individuals use information to present themselves to different audiences – sometimes simultaneously – online, it also gives others the ability to see with whom they are connected. This can lead to evaluations being made based on individuals' connections, or even second level connections. If those second level connections are viewed negatively, some individuals may hold a sense of "guilty by association". It is argued, then, that individuals may need to explain not only their own actions but those actions of their connections too (Boyd & Heer, 2006, pp. 4-5). At the same time, some social media users specifically seek out connections for the positive image it may create, either because of the positive aspects a specific connection is believed to convey, or because of a view that a higher number of connections means an individual is more likeable or agreeable (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010, pp. 1289-1295).

The determination and handling of online connections is also discussed in respect of the influence that existing connections exert on decisions to share (or not share) information (Boyd & Heer, 2006). This can lead to issues of boundary management becoming complicated, especially when a close relationship is considered the main criterion for connecting online (Erickson, 2011). One reason for this is because there may be the social awkwardness of negotiating the request to connect, for example when a close professional colleague wants to make friends on a personal account (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Uski & Lampinen, 2014). There are also practical hurdles associated with the mixing of professional and private contacts on the same online platform, where it is the information practices of individuals' connections that may impact personal reputation. In some cases it is easier to keep different groups of contacts away from each other (Boyd & Heer, 2006).

Others have echoed similar concerns about the judgements based on connections across social media and social networking sites. For example, Qi and Edgar-Nevill (2011) argue that searching social media has become a common activity by potential employers and university administrators, in part for the review of individuals' social networking connections. It has also been observed that reputations can be shaped, and subsequently evaluated, by an individual's online associations based on the photos and comments those connections post in relation to the individuals' own posts, whether or not the individual themselves authorises them (Labrecque et al., 2011; Walther et al., 2008).

There are also discussions in the literature around the use of information from individuals' social networking accounts. These include lists of connections used by law enforcement officials when attempting to identify criminals and possible accomplices. In this context, Qi and Edgar-Nevill (2011, pp. 74-78) argue that users of social networking sites need to be mindful and aware when deciding who to connect with online and whether or not they allow those connections to be viewed by others. Because of this, issues of law enforcement and legal teams making requests for user data on Twitter and Facebook has become such an issue that lawsuits to determine the legality of access have become common place. This has, in turn, prompted some social networking platforms to create guidelines for law enforcement officials requesting such data and include clauses about such requests in their terms and conditions for users (Richards, 2013, pp. 519-548).

Similarly, information shared on social networking sites about personal hobbies and interests may also be used in the determination of individuals' reputations. Hagger-Johnson, Egan, and Stillwell (2011, pp. 71-76) argued that such evidence could be used in the determination of defendants' labelling as a "bad character" in the court systems. Their research investigated individuals' self-disclosure of "sensational interests", described as unusually "violent, morbid, and macabre", and concluded that, among men[11] there is a link between an interest in such activities and a likelihood of using poor judgement leading to acts of bad character. This implies that "liking" or following a group or page[12] could be judged as displaying an interest in the activity, whether or not this is the case.

The investigation of online information and reputation are also of interest to Information Science in relation to citation practices and academic reputation. This is considered in the next section as it relates to "altmetrics", which combines traditional citation analysis with social media practices.

2.4 Literature related to building and managing academic reputations through alternative means or "altmetrics"

Whilst the Science Citation Index has existed for more than half a century, in recent years, academics have begun to investigate alternative means of measuring academic reputations using information from online sources known as "altmetrics". The term was first coined in a 2010 tweet by Jason Priem as a portmanteau of "alternative" and "metrics" (Haustein, Bowman, & Costas, 2010).

The increased use of social media by academics, coupled with an interest in altmetrics, has led to the creation and study of social media's roles in academic citation analysis ("Altmetrics: A manifesto," n.d.; Desrochers et al., 2018; Priem & Costello, 2010; Priem

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[11] The researchers conclude that this link is more complex when looking at females as they may be less likely to disclose sensational interests. They note this is an area that could be further investigated.
[12] The act of liking or following a group or page on sites such as Facebook is similar to becoming friends with someone on the site and allows the group's activity to show up on users' newsfeeds.

& Hemminger, 2010; Priem, Hemminger, & Piwowar, 2011). Priem and Hemminger (2010) explain that this new way of looking at citations is needed because there is a "growing flood of scholarly literature" that is "exposing the weaknesses of current, citation-based methods of evaluating and filtering articles". However, questions have been asked about the reliability of altmetrics providers, as well as the accuracy of the citations they produce (Ortega, 2018).

Researchers investigating the use of altmetrics have also raised questions about the extent to which altmetrics should be used to measure the impact of research, and where the measured impact should be used as evidence for professional promotion (Lupton, 2014b; Neylon, 2014). Further, there are concerns by some academics about the blurring between their personal and professional lives (Lupton, 2014, pp. 22-23) and the risks and benefits of openly identifying as a female academic, which might impact a researcher's altmetrics score (Donald, 2012).

Despite their increasing popularity, criticisms of altmetrics continue (for example, Didegah, Bowman, & Holmberg, 2018; Haustein et al., 2010; Ortega, 2016; Sugimoto, Work, Larivière, & Haustein, 2017). This is in part because it has been suggested that social media complement citations, rather than them acting as an alternative to citation (Haustein et al., 2010). However, the rise of altmetrics has helped to increase interest in the overall use of social media by academics (Desrochers et al., 2018; Didegah et al., 2018; Ortega, 2016; Warren, Raison, & Dasgupta, 2017).

In addition to social networking platforms, the use of social media by academics includes research information management systems (RIMSs). These online platforms are information systems used to manage and share "access to researchers' authored content and identity information" (Stvilia, Wu, & Lee, 2018). By maintaining profiles on RIMSs, researchers build their academic reputations through the promotion of their professional presence and research activities (Jeng, He, & Jiang, 2015; van Noorden, 2014). Research by Stvilia, Wu, and Lee (2018) investigated a range of tasks academics undertake on RIMSs, including those practices that are directly related to reputation. These are (1) the evaluation of researchers' reputations for research based on productivity or impact and (2) building and managing academic reputations by promoting the professional "profiles" or reputations in the research community – including both their personal reputations and the profile of their research. However, their research also showed that RIMSs are used more often for discovering and evaluating the research of others than they are for sharing and promoting their own research.

The research investigating the alternative means of building academic reputations brings citation analysis practices together with similar practices discussed in literature regarding the use of social media. Together, these interdisciplinary areas of study were used to develop the theoretical framework that is discussed in the next section.

2.5 The theoretical framework developed and used in this study

In considering the literature around academic citation and social media practices discussed in this chapter, it is possible to compare the similarities between the practices used to build academic reputation and related practices in the use of social media. These similarities and differences, highlighted in Table 3, led to the development of the theoretical framework used in this study discussed in the sections below.

2.5.1 Gaps in the literature and the research questions developed from them

To develop the research questions addressed in this study, the literature was first considered against the two overarching research themes (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1). The first of these research theme relates to the *building and management of personal reputations*. Here, the literature shows that individuals may self-regulate or censor their activities by managing the information that they share across their different social media profiles, based on the platform or audience for that profile. There is also some evidence that individuals may manage their professional and private connections with the intention of managing their personal reputations. Prior research has also investigated the creation of "personal brands" as well as other methods of building online profiles as a way to manage personal reputations. However, there does not appear to be discussion of the extent to which individuals manage online information in regards to their personal reputation.

Also related to the first research theme is literature that investigates anonymity and the use of pseudonyms. Here, the research shows that *anonymous* accounts are sometimes used to seek information for medical or mental health issues; to hide sexual or gender identities and socially stigmatised activities; or to protect an individual's perceived reputation in regards to employment. Similarly, there is evidence in the literature that some individuals may use pseudonyms as a way of experimenting with different personalities; to separate distinct parts of their lives; or to create or showcase different identities (for example, different professional and private identities).

The second research theme considers the *evaluation of personal reputations of others*. Here, evidence from the literature is weak, and lacks investigations into *how* individuals use online information to evaluate the personal reputations of others. There is limited evidence regarding the review of social media profiles from a human resources or employer perspective, however there does not appear to be evidence of a systematic approach to this.

When considered together, this review of literature helped to develop and refine the four research questions investigated in this thesis, as shown in Table 2 below. The first two of these questions are related to the theme of building and management of personal reputation whilst the third question relates to the theme of the evaluation of personal reputation. The fourth question acts as an overarching research question for this work.

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 reputations of others based on the information available to them online?
RQ4	How do information behaviours related to reputation building, management, and evaluation on social media reflect similar citation practices related to the building, management, and evaluation of academic reputation?

Table 2: Research questions for this study

2.5.2 Similarities and differences between building, managing, and evaluating identity and reputation through academic citations and social media platforms

The means by which individuals build, manage, and evaluate identity and reputation through academic citation practices can be aligned to some aspects of social media use and practice (Priem & Hemminger, 2010). As discussed by Stvilia, Wu, and Lee (2018), previous studies have shown that academics are using a range of social networking platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, for scholarly purposes. These platforms are used by academics in part to disseminate research, share information about research activities, follow and participate in online discussions about relevant research, and to network and connect with other scholars. Some of these similarities are outlined in Table 3 below in relation to the first three research questions. Where the extant literature suggests that social media practices are undertaken in relationship to the themes presented in the table, citations are provided. In cases of *possible* corresponding social media practices (that are not documented in the extant literature), these are noted in the third column of the table *without* supporting in-text citations.

There are potential similarities between the citation and social media practices shown in Table 3. However, there appears to be key differences in how and if they are undertaken in regards to the building, management, or evaluation of reputation. In the case of citation practices, for example, many of the activities undertaken by academics appear to have a direct impact on the building of identity and reputation of *other* academics, as well as on their own. However, the same does not appear to be the case with social media practices where there tends to be a strong practice of creating information regarding individuals' own identities and reputations, and less reliance on linking to the works of others.

RQ	**Theme**	**Practices discussed in the citation analysis literature**	**Possible related practices in social media**
RQ1	Linking or connecting with other individuals as a means of showing agreement or similarity	Citing someone within the main content of a paper (Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Ding et al., 2013; Harwood, 2009; Hyland, 2003; White, 2001) Making note of someone in acknowledgements or footnotes of a paper (Cronin, 1998)	Liking online content created by others Re-posting content created by others Linking user-generated content to content created by others Tagging individuals in online content Hosting or providing guest blogs
	Showing disagreement with another individual	Citing someone within the main content of a paper to refute or critique the work of another (Harwood, 2009)	Commenting in a contrary manner on another individual's online content (Suler, 2004)
	Self-promotion	Self-citation or otherwise referencing previous works by one's self (Costas et al., 2010; Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Harwood, 2009; Hyland, 2003; White, 2001; Wilhite & Fong, 2012) Sharing details of work on social or professional networking sites or other online platforms (Costas, Zahedi, & Wouters, 2015; Stvilia et al., 2018)	Linking to or posting self-created content to the social media profiles of others (Fertik & Thompson, 2010; Karaduman, 2013; Mayfield, 2010) Cross-linking or cross-posting self-created content across several platforms

RQ	Theme	Practices discussed in the citation analysis literature	Possible related practices in social media
	Strategic placement of content in favourable locations	Agreeing to coerced citations (Wilhite & Fong, 2012) Citing well-known authors in specific fields of study (Cronin, 1998)	Participation in blogs and online communities Tagging well-known individuals in online content via user names to form an alignment
	Connecting with individuals to boost own reputation	Citing well-respected authors (Cronin, 1998; Harwood & Petrić, 2012) Following academics on networking platforms (Cronin & Shaw, 2002a) Co-authoring papers, or providing “gift” co-authorships (Cronin, 1998; Harwood, 2009)	Friending, following, or otherwise connecting with individuals online (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Boyd & Heer, 2006; Erickson, 2011)
	Fraudulent practices or identity masking	Coercive self-citations or other citations added at the request of a publisher or editor (Cronin, 2001b)	Sharing information online under a pseudonym or via an anonymous account (Bronstein, 2013; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Greidanus & Everall, 2010; Harviainen, 2014; Kozhan, 2011; Lingel & Boyd, 2013; Maltby et al., 2018; Sharon & John, 2018)
RQ2	Linking or connecting with other individuals as a means of showing agreement or similarity	Citing well-respected authors (Cronin, 1998; Harwood & Petrić, 2012) Following academics on networking platforms (Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Lupton, 2014a) Co-authoring papers with well-respected academics (Cronin, 1998)	Linking to well-respected bloggers Tagging others in online content Re-posting content created by others Providing or offering guest blogs

RQ	Theme	Practices discussed in the citation analysis literature	Possible related practices in social media
	Showing disagreement with another individual	Citing someone within the main content of a paper to refute or critique the work of another (Harwood, 2009)	Commenting in a contrary manner on another individual's online content (Suler, 2004)
	Self-promotion	Self-citation or otherwise referencing previous works by one's self (Costas et al., 2010; Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Harwood, 2009; Hyland, 2003; White, 2001; Wilhite & Fong, 2012) Sharing through social media platforms ("Altmetrics: A manifesto," n.d.; Cronin, Snyder, Rosenbaum, Martinson, & Callahan, 1998; Lupton, 2014a; Priem et al., 2011; Stvilia et al., 2018)	Linking back to own content on other platforms Cross-posting information from one platform on another
	Strategic placement of content in favourable locations	Sharing through social media platforms ("Altmetrics: A manifesto," n.d.; Costas et al., 2015; Stvilia et al., 2018)	Sharing information on social media platforms (Davis, 2012; Furnell, 2010; Osatuyi, 2013; Suler, 2004; van Dijck, 2013)
RQ3	Evaluating the connections of others to determine their reputation	Reviewing list of contacts on networking platforms ("Altmetrics: A manifesto," n.d.) Reviewing reference lists in articles (Cronin et al., 1998)	Reviewing social media activities of connections (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Walther et al., 2008) Reviewing lists of online connections (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Boyd & Heer, 2006; Walther et al., 2008)

RQ	Theme	Practices discussed in the citation analysis literature	Possible related practices in social media
	Evaluating individuals based on their overall visibility	Reviewing citation indexes (Cronin, 1998; Cronin, Snyder, & Atkins, 1997; Stvilia et al., 2018)	Reviewing online footprints of others (Carmagnola et al., 2013; Das & Sahoo, 2011; Labrecque et al., 2011; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Qi & Edgar-Nevill, 2011; Walther et al., 2008)
	Evaluating individuals based on how they use social media	Too much online self-promotion can be seen as egotistical (Hyland, 2003; Lupton, 2014a) Self-promotion can lead to questions about the oversimplification of work (Cronin & Crawford, 1999) Senior academics forming cliques on social media can be seen as exclusionary towards more junior academics (Cronin & Meho, 2008)	Posting a high frequency of content Posting content too many times in a single day Bragging or "humble bragging"[13] on a regular basis

Table 3: Similarities between practices discussed in the citation analysis literature and related practices evident in the social media literature

Research question four (RQ4) considers the extent to which the similarities between citation practice and social media practice, as shown in Table 3 above, can be confirmed. This is addressed in detail in Chapter 7, Section 7.2, page 150.

2.5.3 Opportunities to make a contribution to the existing knowledge

The findings of the literature review identified a number of further questions to address in this study of the role of online information in personal reputation management and evaluation. In Table 4, these are matched thematically with the first three research questions and show where there are opportunities to extend

[13] A humblebrag is information that appears to be modest or self-depreciating but is designed to be self-congratulatory or boastful.

knowledge in the domain. Whilst the existing literature regarding online information and reputation management is dispersed across a number of disciplines and domains of enquiry (including citation analysis) there remains a lack of in-depth research specific to the interests of this doctoral investigation. It is therefore worthwhile investigating personal reputation management from an information perspective. This brings new insight to the field of Information Science, most notably related to information practices.

RQs	**Questions raised**	**Level of coverage in the extant literature**	**Opportunities to make a contribution?**
RQ1	How do individuals manage online information regarding their combined professional and private reputations as one "personal" reputation? How do individuals decide how to represent their identities on online platforms?	*Limited* Individuals use self-regulation techniques to manage the information that they will share, and with whom they will share it. Individuals share different types of information on different types of platforms. Individuals manage information sharing and connections specifically for the blurring (or separation) of their private and professional lives. Individuals might use pseudonyms and anonymous accounts to "experiment" with personalities or identities online These may, or may not, be linked back to an offline identity later.	Yes – no prior academic studies have focused on individuals' "whole" lives in regards to managing online information; previous studies have concentrated on a single aspect of individuals' lives or identities (such as professional lives).

RQs	Questions raised	Level of coverage in the extant literature	Opportunities to make a contribution?
RQ2	How do individuals decide what information to share online, and where to share it? To what extent do individuals intentionally engage in reputation building?	*Limited* Individuals manage reputation by masking or hiding activities or personal information for the purposes of seeking or sharing information. This is achieved using pseudonyms and anonymous accounts, or by deliberately not providing profile information on platforms.	Yes – prior academic studies have concentrated on information sharing as it pertains to a single aspect of individuals' lives (such as professional identities or information seeking for specific interests), but have not focused on individuals' "whole" lives.
RQ3	To what extent are individuals evaluating the reputations of others based on the information found about them online? To what extent does the quality of information collected influence the determination of individuals' reputations? How does offline knowledge of an individual influence the evaluation of information gathered about them from online sources?	*Limited* The quality and accuracy of information influences reputation evaluations, as does information that is outdated and no longer accurate. Those with whom individuals are directly connected can influence their reputations, as can their second-level connections.	Yes – no prior academic studies into the reputation evaluations of individuals' own connections; previous studies have been based on professional evaluations, such as those by human resource practitioners.

Table 4: Themes identified in the literature relevant to the research and the questions raised from the apparent gaps in the extant knowledge

2.6 Conclusion

The findings from this literature review on information sharing practices in citation analysis and everyday information use have been used to inform the empirical work discussed in this thesis. A suitable qualitative research approach was designed and implemented to investigate the overarching research themes as they relate to the theoretical framework developed for this study, as detailed in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the methodological approach used for this doctoral investigation. It outlines the processes that were undertaken in the consideration of potential qualitative research methods and presents the rational used in determining the methods chosen for data collection. It is organised in five sections. These are:

(1) **Research philosophy** (Section 3.2);
(2) **Research traditions in human information behaviour and use and their applications to this study** (Section 3.3);
(3) **An overview of the field work** (Section 3.4);
(4) **The data coding and analysis** (Section 3.5); and
(5) **An overview of how the findings are presented** (Section 3.6).

3.2 Research philosophy

A pragmatic research approach was adopted at the beginning of this doctoral investigation, with consideration given to the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, or a mixture of both. This allowed for an unprejudiced approach in determining the most appropriate methods of investigation, as described in Section 3.3.1 below. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) state that this approach enables "flexibility" in the investigative techniques used in social research, especially as attempts are made to address a range of research questions that arise. Through the process of clarifying the research questions and designing the methodological approach for this study, including the creation of the theoretical framework (Chapter 2, Table 3, page 40), an interpretivist philosophical approach was adopted.

According to Pickard (2013, pp. 11-12) there are two broad ways of considering interpretivism: (1) "empirical interpretivism", or that involves "the natural settings of social phenomena" and (2) "critical theory", or that which "engages in ideologically oriented investigation". This work falls into the former category, as it is focused on determining the ways in which individuals' information behaviours are deployed in the building, management, and evaluation of personal reputation in online social media platforms.

The interpretivist approach recognises that the world looks different to different people and holds an appreciation for the differences between people (Ford, 2015). Through the lens of interpretivism, we "interpret … experiences" as a way of making sense of the reality that we are presented with (Cibangu, 2013) which, in the case of qualitative research, is the empirical data that needs to be analysed and interpreted.

A qualitative researcher interacts with both the subjects being investigated and the knowledge or "data" that is collected during the research process. Because of this, an interpretivist philosophical approach aided in the analysis and interpretation of the data, leading to a stronger, more in-depth understanding of the motivations leading to the information behaviours that aid in the building, management, and evaluation of personal reputations.

3.3 Research traditions in citation analysis and human information behaviour and use and their applications to this study

This qualitative research draws upon methods used in human information behaviour and use studies with the use of participant diaries and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This method was selected after evaluating the practical and ethical implications of other options, as outlined below.

In considering the literature around academic citation and social media practices, these individual areas of reputation building and evaluation can be drawn upon and applied to a broader study of online information's role in reputation building and evaluation across a number of social media platforms. An investigation seeking to discover the role that online information plays in the process of building and evaluating reputation will help to further the knowledge base of online information's role in reputation.

The methods of investigation employed most often when researching academic citations tends to favour quantitative analysis, measuring and evaluating the overall citations counts of an author or publication (for example: Cronin & Shaw, 2007; Sugimoto & Cronin, 2012, 2013). There is less research into *how* and *why* academics make citation decisions. However, there are also a limited number of studies that include at least some level of qualitative research (for example, Harwood, 2009;

Hyland, 2003; Milard & Tanguy, 2018). In Hyland's study (2003) that investigates self-citation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two researchers from each of the eight disciplines investigated to determine an "insider" understanding of preferences and practices. The limited number of qualitative studies, including those investigating the motivations behind a citing author's referencing behaviours, was noted as a central problem within citation analysis in the past (Cronin, 2000, p. 447). However, the predominance of quantitative studies is still evident in the Information Science literature today.

In contrast, research methods deployed in studies on social media practices and in human information behaviour and use studies are more likely to deploy qualitative methods. This is because they seek to answer questions about individuals' motivations, and the reasoning for their actions. They use a mix of ethnographic observation, qualitative surveys, case studies, and/or in-depth interviews. There also tends to be an element of secondary data analysis, generally through coding and interpreting online content such as forum discussions or public social networking feeds. Quantitative investigations are used to a lesser extent, often to investigate the degrees to which individuals are connected with others through "friending" or "following" others. In addition, much of the research conducted to date is concentrated on single aspects of individuals' lives, such as employment (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Madera, 2012; Roberts & Roach, 2008) or mental health issues (Duguay, 2014; Yue et al., 2010).

Further, investigations into academic citation and social media practices tend to lack a whole-world view that considers how individuals manage their online activities and information in regards to their personal reputations, as well as how they evaluate the reputations of others based on the online evidence available to them.

3.3.1 Determining the method of investigation

A challenge in determining a robust method of investigation for this study was establishing a way to examine both broad research themes at the same time. It was determined that semi-structured, in-depth interviews would be an appropriate research tool for gathering data related to participants' own social media practices in the building and maintenance of their personal reputations. This is because semi-structured interviews have the advantage that they do not limit the interview to a set of pre-determined responses, but at the same time the use of pre-determined questions gives uniformity to the investigation (Qu & Dumay, 2011, pp. 246-247). Further, Bryman (2012, pp. 470-471) suggests that semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow the interviewer to gain a solid understanding of the issues, through the interviewee's explanation of their personal understandings and behaviours. However, conversations with potential participants at the early stages of this doctoral study suggested that answering questions regarding the evaluation of others was more challenging, especially when not actively interacting with the social media profiles of others.

Four potential methods were considered in an effort to create an environment where participants could interact with online information whilst talking about how they evaluate the personal reputations of others. These are outlined in Table 5 below.

Option	Data collection method	Description
Option 1	Profile mock-ups	Researcher creates false user profiles. Profiles contain information that mimics situations discussed in the literature. Interviews are used to discuss how reputations are evaluated with the online information provided.
Option 2	Participant screen shots	Working with researcher, participants create screen shots of their own online profiles. Other participants then evaluate the reputations of each other based on the screen shots provided. Interviews are used to discuss how reputations are evaluated with the online information provided.
Option 3	Observation	During the interview, participants are invited to discuss how they use online information to evaluate others. This is done whilst the participants interact with their own social media accounts.
Option 4	Diaries and interviews	Participants are asked to keep a diary that records their evaluation practices, as well as the processes they undertake to build and create their own personal reputations. At the end of the week, participants take part in a semi-structured interview.

Table 5: Potential methods for investigating the role of online information in the evaluation of personal reputation

Option 1 was considered to be unrealistic for this study as the technical and time-based challenges required to create the multiple profiles were impractical. It would also have been difficult to recreate a fair representation of user profiles across a range of social media platforms. Option 2 presented similar challenges, as the limited number of participant profiles would not have created the same wide profile selection available in a natural social media environment.

Option 3 was given greater consideration than the first two, as it would have provided participants the opportunity to be observed in their normal online environments. However, concerns related to behavioural changes during observation, as well as the privacy of participants' social media connections (e.g. friends or followers), whose profiles would be viewed without their consent, meant that this was not a practical solution.

Ultimately, option 4 was determined to be the most appropriate method for determining how participants evaluate the reputations of others. This was due to the practicality of the data collection tools. Further, based on feedback from participants in the pilot study, this option would not present a burdensome amount of work. The decision was therefore taken to use a combination of participant diary-keeping and in-depth, semi-structured interviews in the study.

It should also be noted that there is a tradition in some Information Science research, including the domain of human information behaviour and use, where diaries are used as alternatives to interviews (Pickard, 2013). It has been noted by Narayan, Case, and Edwards (2011, p. 3) that the rich data they provide are reliable sources of information and minimise the potential for inaccurate reporting that can happen when an action is recorded long after it took place. Several studies use a combination of diary-keeping and interviews (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Dervin, 1983; McKenzie, 2003; Rieh, 2004; Shah & Leeder, 2016) and there is a growing trend towards these combined data collection methods in Information Science domains (Pickard, 2013). Although these studies vary the way and order in which they collect data, they share a common theme in that they combine the robustness of two forms of data collection for analysis.

3.4 Field work

This section discusses how the field work was undertaken. It is presented in three parts: (1) an explanation of the pilot study that was used to test the data collection tools, (2) the data collection process for the main study, and (3) the ethical considerations for the study, including ensuring informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The field work for this study was conducted from July 2015 through January 2016. See Figure 2 below for a full overview of the design and implementation of this study.

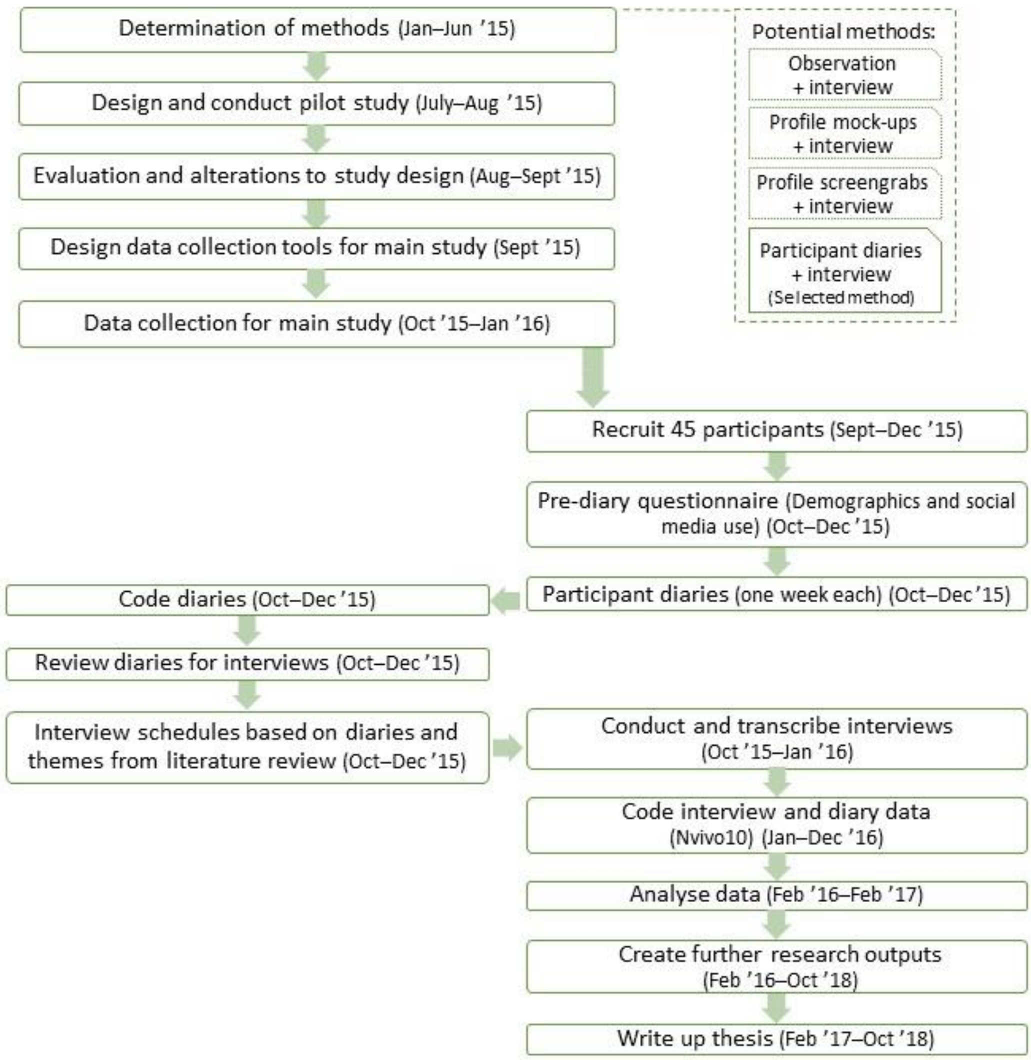

Figure 2: Overview of the methods design and implementation of this doctoral investigation

3.4.1 The pilot study

A small pilot study was conducted between July and August 2015. The aims of this study were to test the chosen methods of investigation and to determine the time commitments required for data collection prior to designing the main study.

There were eight participants selected for the pilot study, all of whom were PhD students based in Scotland. The sample was chosen for two reasons: (1) the ease of access to participants and (2) the assumption of a diverse set of backgrounds. The small sample size used for the pilot study meant that the theoretical saturation point (the point at which no new data is emerging) was likely not achieved (Bryman, 2012, pp. 421-426). However, as the primary focus at this stage was to test the methods of study, rather than to investigate the research questions, this was not a concern. It was also anticipated that this stage of the investigation would help to determine the appropriate sample size for the main study and the time commitments that would be required for data collection and interview transcriptions.

A multi-step data collection process was undertaken for the pilot study using participant diaries and semi-structured interviews, using previous work as guides (Hilligoss & Rieh, 2008; Rieh, 2004). Pilot study participants were asked to keep diaries over the course of one week as they engaged with their social media accounts. Within one week of completing the diaries, participants took part in hour-long, semi-structured interviews.

Demographic information was not collected as a formal part of the pilot study, although the ages and education levels of all participants were known through conversations prior to the study. However, it became clear during the pilot process that a stronger understanding of the participants' backgrounds and their past use of technology and social media would be useful.

3.4.1.1 Participant diaries

Participants were asked to keep social media diaries for one week. The diaries were used to record the actions (or non-actions) participants engaged in whilst interacting with their social media feeds, especially as they related to the building or maintenance of reputation, as well as their thoughts or reactions regarding the reputation evaluations of others. Diary entries were to be based on the information that appeared naturally as they used their social media accounts, as opposed to purposefully reviewing social networking profiles for the diary-keeping exercise.

The use of diaries as a data collection tool was intended as a way to encourage participants to actively think about their engagement with social media. It was expected that this exercise would provide the participants a better understanding of their own social media practices and motivations for evaluating the reputations of others during interviews. This was confirmed to be the case during the participant interviews.

Participant feedback on the diary-keeping exercise indicated that the length of time for that phase of data collection was acceptable. Those participants who kept electronic diaries stated that they were happy with the process. All four of the participants who kept hand-written diaries noted that they would have preferred to maintain an electronic diary instead. To address the strong desire for electronic diaries, joining instructions for the main study included alternative options for submitting electronic diaries.

3.4.1.2 Participant interviews

Semi-structured interviews were scheduled to take place within one week of participants completing their diaries. Prior to the interviews, diaries were reviewed and annotated, with a list of follow-up questions or points of clarification added to the interview guide when deemed relevant.

Seven of the eight interviews were conducted face-to-face in a conference room setting. The eighth interview was conducted via Skype. Interviews were recorded using two Android-based voice recorders (Samsung Galaxy6 and Samsung Tab2) to ensure there was a back-up recording if one device failed. Minimal hand-written notes were also taken during the course of the interviews to record additional thoughts or clarifications related to the participants' comments.

An interview guide was created before the interviews took place (see Appendix A). This was created as a three-page document that listed primary questions related to each of the research questions, as well as follow-up prompts to ensure that all of the themes uncovered in the literature were discussed. Each interview began with a general question about participants' use of social media as a reputation-building tool, with follow-up questions asked as needed for clarification or expansion of an answer. The semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that some topics were covered on more than one occasion. Often, on subsequent discussions of a topic, there were more details provided, which were more relevant at that point in the discussion. For example, if a participant mentioned deleting posts whilst discussing their overall online activities, that same topic might be covered in more detail when discussing issues of regret or self-censorship.

The participants appeared comfortable throughout the interview process and seemed willing and able to answer all of the questions posed to them during the interviews. However, most participants indicated that they felt uncomfortable talking about the reputational evaluations of others, as they felt they were being "judgemental". The participants also seemed genuinely surprised that they had been making evaluations without realising that they were doing so.

Conducting the interviews using the three-page guide was determined to be a cumbersome process. The conversational format of the interviews made following a guide difficult as the flowing nature of the conversations meant that questions were not covered in a specific order. This realisation led to the development of an interview grid for the main study, as discussed in Section 3.4.2.4.

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed into Word documents. Whilst the act of transcribing the data was beneficial to creating a stronger familiarity with the data, it was also a time-consuming process. Because of this, the decision to outsource interview transcriptions was made. This process is detailed in Section 3.4.2.4.

3.4.1.3 Suitability of the proposed approach based on the pilot study

The purpose of the pilot exercise was to establish an approach for the larger study. The two-part data collection method was a success in that it provided two rich forms of data for the analysis stage of the study.

At the start of the pilot study, it was thought that participants might not realise they were making reputational evaluations, but that the act of recording their thoughts whilst interacting with social media might make them more aware of how online information was impacting that evaluation process. This was confirmed during the interview stage when all eight participants made comments about how they felt when they realised they were making evaluations without conscious intent. That confirmation provided further confidence that the use of participant diaries was a strong data collection tool.

As the diaries meant that participants were more aware of their social media practices during the interviews, they were able to discuss the evaluation processes more easily than they might have done before realising that they were evaluating the reputations of others. This strengthened the quality of the data collected during the interview process. Further, the ability to ask follow-up questions about diary entries meant that data was strengthened even further.

When combined, the data collected from the diaries and interviews produced a robust data set for analysis. The data was easy to work with and could be accessed for coding and analysis with relative ease.

3.4.1.4 Conclusions from pilot study

The aim of the pilot study was to determine the appropriateness of processes and methods for the main doctoral investigation. This was a success as it provided insights regarding what did or did not work, and how those insights might impact the main study. The pilot study led to the minor changes in the data collection tools for the main study, as discussed in the next section.

Minor changes were made to the data collection methods for the main study based on the learnings of the pilot study. These included (1) the addition of a pre-participation background questionnaire to gather demographic data as well as participants' levels of social media use, (2) a stronger emphasis on the use of electronic diaries, and (3) a condensed interview schedule in the form of a thematic grid.

3.4.2 Design and implementation of the main study

This section details the design and implementation of the main study. It includes details about the sample selection, data collection, and data analysis processes for the empirical data used in this study.

3.4.2.1 The sample

There were 45 participants in the main study (28 female; 17 male). This group is separate from the eight participants in the pilot study and the sample size is consistent with other qualitative Information Science studies, (for example, Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Ellis, Cox, & Hall, 1993; Meyers, Fisher, & Marcoux, 2007; R. Savolainen, 2007; Reijo Savolainen, 2004, 2008; Reijo Savolainen & Kari, 2004; Yang, 2015). Fortythree participants were recruited through social networking channels including Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, and two were referred to the study through word-of-mouth. In order to take part in this study, participants needed to be UK-based social media users. There were no upper or lower limits set for participants' levels of social media use, nor were there requirements related to which platforms participants used.

It was initially believed that participants' social media practices might vary based on their age or generation. This led to the decision to recruit participants in three generational groupings[14]: Generation Y (born 1981-97); Generation X (born 1965-80); and the Baby Boomer generation (born 1946-64). Fifteen participants were recruited from each of the three grouping to ensure a wide range of ages. Despite the initial belief, however, it was not determined that age or generation led to noticeable differences in the social media practices of this sample. Furthermore, there were no noticeable differences based on the gender of participants and these factors were not considered further.

Once participants were recruited, they were assigned pseudonyms to ensure participants' anonymity during data analysis and the presentation of the findings. Participants were not made aware of the pseudonyms chosen for them. Pseudonyms were based on popular names from the year each participant was born[15], as it was still thought that a participant's age or generation might impact the findings.

The majority of the participants in this study identified as either heavy or moderate social media users (41 of 45). The most used platforms were Facebook (43 participants), Twitter (41 participants), and LinkedIn (36 participants). At the time of the data collection, all 45 participants were employed in professional or managerial roles, or were recently retired. Further, the participants in this study noted higher than average education levels with nearly 90 percent of the group (40 of 45) holding a bachelor's degree or higher qualification, compared to a UK average of 34 percent for

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[14] Generation categories are based on definitions set by the Pew Research Center, located at http://www.pewresearch.org/files/2015/01/FT_generations-defined.png.
[15] These were based on historical data held by the Office for National Statistics and the National Records of Scotland.

those aged 25-64 (OECD, 2016, p.43). Whilst participants were not selected for their employment or educational backgrounds, it was recognised that this will likely impact the findings for this study, and is considered as part of the discussion (Chapter 7). A snapshot of the participants in this study are shown in Table 6 below, including their self-defined levels of use for social networking sites and their rate of use for Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. See Appendix B for full participant details.

Pseudonym (Gender)	**Generation** (Age)	**SNS use levels**	**Facebook**	**Twitter**	**LinkedIn**
Adrian (M)	Baby boomer (59)	Moderate	Daily	Weekly	Weekly
Alan (M)	Baby boomer (61)	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	Weekly
Alison (F)	Baby boomer (53)	Moderate	Daily	Weekly	-
Amanda (F)	Generation X (45)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	-
Andrew (M)	Generation Y (22)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Daily
Callum (M)	Generation Y (23)	Moderate	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly
Colin (M)	Baby boomer (63)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Daily
Craig (M)	Generation Y (27)	Heavy	Monthly	Daily	Daily
David (M)	Baby boomer (55)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Diane (F)	Baby boomer (56)	Heavy	-	Daily	Monthly
Donna (F)	Generation Y (33)	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	Monthly
Emma (F)	Generation Y (28)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Fiona (F)	Baby boomer (61)	Heavy	Daily	Monthly	Weekly
Fraser (M)	Generation Y (34)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Gillian (F)	Generation X (38)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Daily
Hannah (F)	Generation Y (30)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Hazel (F)	Baby boomer (60)	Light	Weekly	Monthly	-
Heather (F)	Generation Y (28)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Helen (F)	Generation X (50)	Moderate	Daily	-	-
Jacqueline (F)	Generation X (49)	Moderate	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
James (M)	Generation X (44)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	-
Jennifer (F)	Generation Y (31)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Joanne (F)	Generation X (44)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Karen (F)	Generation X (40)	Moderate	Daily	-	Weekly
Kelly (F)	Generation X (35)	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	-

Pseudonym (Gender)	**Generation** (Age)	**SNS use levels**	**Facebook**	**Twitter**	**LinkedIn**
Kerry (F)	Generation Y (27)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Kevin (M)	Generation X (35)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Laura (F)	Generation X (35)	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	Daily
Liam (M)	Generation Y (27)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Linda (F)	Baby boomer (54)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Lynn (F)	Generation X (37)	Moderate	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
Michelle (F)	Generation X (37)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	-
Natalie (F)	Generation Y (26)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Daily
Nicola (F)	Generation X (41)	Heavy	Daily	Weekly	Weekly
Rachel (F)	Baby boomer (57)	Moderate	-	Daily	-
Rebecca (F)	Generation Y (33)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Roger (M)	Baby boomer (69)	Moderate	Weekly	Daily	Monthly
Rosemary (F)	Baby boomer (53)	Light	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Scott (M)	Generation Y (26)	Light	Daily	Monthly	Monthly
Sharon (F)	Generation X (45)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Stephen (M)	Baby boomer (61)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Susan (F)	Baby boomer (51)	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly
Wendy (F)	Baby boomer (51)	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Weekly
Yvonne (F)	Generation X (38)	Moderate	Weekly	-	Daily
Zoe (F)	Generation Y (34)	Light	Daily	-	-

Table 6: Participant details, social media levels, and platform use

In addition to the 45 participants who completed the data collection process for this study, a further 48 individuals indicated a willingness to participate but did not complete the study. This included 34 individuals who failed to reply to emails sent regarding informed consent, eight individuals who felt they could not meet the time requirement, three who did not feel that they were qualified to speak about online reputation, and one who did not feel their laptop had the ability to keep an electronic diary or to do a voice interview. Two of the 48 left the study part-way through their diary-keeping week due to personal commitments.

3.4.2.2 Background questionnaire

Prior to beginning their diaries, participants completed a short background questionnaire (see Appendix C). The questionnaire was designed to determine participants' education levels, employment categories, and Internet use, including which social media platforms they used and how often they used them.

There were two reasons for the questionnaire: (1) to gain a better understanding of participants' backgrounds for use during their interviews and (2) to provide deeper context and understandings for comparative metrics for the data analysis stage of this study.

3.4.2.3 Diaries

Participants were asked to maintain a social media diary for one week. They were asked to record their activities as well as their motivations for sharing – or not sharing – information online. Participants were also asked to record their thoughts related to the reputational evaluations of others, as determined by the information they shared online, at this time. (See Appendix D for participant instructions.) Follow-up emails were sent to participants half-way through their diary-keeping week. The emails served as a way to (1) check in on participants' progress and to provide further guidance for those who needed it and (2) to set up a time and date for follow-up interviews.

The diaries varied in length from 173 words (Rebecca) to 4,050 words (Linda). Twenty participants submitted diaries of fewer than 1,000 words and the average across the group was 1,380 words. The content for the diaries also varied. This included a selection of basic activity logs with little or no personal commentary, detailed opinions and insight, and high levels of reflective thought. All 45 participants provided at least some activity log type details and the majority included more reflective insights and opinions.

Participants were given the option of recording their diaries electronically or on paper. Four participants used paper diaries. These were mailed to the participants with instructions and a copy of the informed consent forms. On completion of the diary exercise, the notebooks and signed participant forms were returned using a pre-paid and addressed envelope. One participant provided diary entries as email messages three times over the course of the week covering the full seven days. The remaining 40 participants returned their diaries at the end of their diary-keeping week via email as single Word documents.

Hand-written diaries were transcribed into Word documents. All 45 diaries were then formatted to ensure consistency for coding purposes. Formatting included eliminating abbreviations and spacing in platform names (for example: “FB” became Facebook and “Linked In” became LinkedIn) to ensure that word-search queries captured all relevant terms. Diaries were also amended to anonymise instances where participants referred to themselves, their connections, or their places of employment or other places by name. In these cases, participants’ names were changed to the pseudonyms they have been assigned for this investigation whilst the names of their connections were given another pseudonym – unless the participant had already indicated that the names they used were not real. Company and place names were anonymised by using brackets (for example, [company name] or [city]). See Appendix E for sample diary transcripts.

Each participant’s diary was reviewed before their interview. During the review, follow-up questions were created where more information or clarification was needed.

3.4.2.4 Interviews

After completing their diaries, participants took part in semi-structured interviews. These were arranged to take place approximately one week after the diaries were returned. Thirty-four interviews were conducted via Skype with the remaining 11 taking place in person. All 45 interviews were recorded using two Android-based devices. Interviews varied in length from 33 minutes (Hazel) to 1 hour and 20 minutes (Fraser). There were approximately 43 hours of interview recordings in total.

Interviews were transcribed into Word documents as they were completed. Most of these (37) were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The remaining eight diaries were transcribed by the researcher conducting the interviews. In all cases, the completed transcripts were formatted in a similar manner to the diaries by the researcher. This included anonymising data where necessary and incorporating limited notes in brackets where clarification was needed, for example, adding context for data related to current events. Audio recordings were played back during the formatting process to ensure that the transcripts were accurate, as well as to provide an opportunity to examine pauses, voice inflections, and other subtleties of the spoken word which might need to be noted for further context. See Appendix F for sample interview transcripts.

The interview schedule was developed based on themes and concepts that emerged from the literature review. The interview schedule was designed in the form of a grid with key themes and topics to be covered. Each grid was further customised with additional topics that arose from participants' diary data. The interview grid meant that topics could be scored off as they were discussed by the participants. (See Appendix G for example of interview grids.) Where these topics were not addressed in the natural flow of the conversation, prompting questions were used. However, not all participants had experiences with or thoughts about all of the themes covered in the interview schedule. Further, some participants identified practices not previously discussed or investigated.

3.4.2.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this doctoral investigation was sought prior to beginning data collection. This was done following the procedures set forth in Edinburgh Napier University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity. The guiding principles of this code are those of non-maleficence (do no harm) and beneficence (do good), (Edinburgh Napier University, 2013, p. 2).

This process included the completion of a self-assessment form. Whilst the form indicated potential ethical issues because of the use of social media information, these concerns were addressed through appropriate data protection measures including secure data storage and the use of anonymised data as previously discussed. Further, it was recognised that potential ethical issues might arise if a participant mentioned another person by name (or other identifiable information) during the data collection processes. However, identifying information was deleted or otherwise anonymised during the transcription process.

3.4.2.6 Informed consent

Informed consent is a vital part of research ethics and integrity, and was obtained prior to participants beginning the study. Participants were provided with three separate opportunities to confirm their consent for this study.

The first opportunity to provide consent was provided by email. This was in the form of two documents. The first document outlined the aims of the research and detailed the interview process, privacy and data protection controls, and where the research was expected to be shared or otherwise published. The second document was an informed consent form stating that the individual was freely and voluntarily consenting to participation in the research and what their rights were for withdrawing from the research. (See Appendix H for examples.) Participants indicated their consent by replying in the affirmative to the email.

The second opportunity for consent was provided when participants began the online background questionnaire. The first page of the questionnaire explained what consent was being sought (see Appendix C). In order to continue with the study, participants were required to confirm their consent.

The third and final opportunity for consent was verbal. This consent was obtained at the start of the interviews, to ensure that participants were still willing to proceed with the study. Whilst there were no instances of participants declining their consent to proceed, it was planned to destroy data provided by any participants who decided not to continue at this stage.

As previously mentioned, it was recognised that participants may identify their connections during the process of data collection. Whilst those individuals were not available to provide informed consent, this was not considered to be a breach of ethics as they were not identified in the transcribed data or in the thesis. However, participants were encouraged to refrain from using the names of their connections wherever possible.

3.4.2.7 Anonymity and confidentiality

Data were anonymised during the transcription and formatting process. Here, participants' real names were changed to the pseudonyms that were assigned to them at the start of the study. Further, transcripts were also amended to anonymise instances where participants referred to their connections, their places of employment, or other indefinable places by name. In these cases, their connections were given pseudonyms whilst company and place names were anonymised.

For interview transcriptions which were undertaken by an external transcriptionist, a confidentiality agreement was signed. Further, voice files were trimmed at the start and end of each interview to exclude any identifiable information that was revealed during the confirmation of ongoing consent at the beginning and any informal conversations that took place at the end of the interviews, but before the recording was stopped.

All data was stored in accordance with Edinburgh Napier University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity. Raw voice data, and diary and interview transcripts were encrypted and stored on secure server space provided by the university. Backup files were kept on an encrypted external device under physical lock and key, along with hand-written diaries. Raw, non-anonymised data will be destroyed upon successful completion of the doctoral thesis and subsequent viva, in accordance with data protection protocols. This includes all voice files, hand-written diaries, and original diary and interview transcripts, prior to being anonymised.

3.5 Data analysis

Data analysis for this research took place between October 2015 and February 2017, as shown in Figure 2, Section 3.4. This multi-step data analysis process (see Figure 3 below) included using computing software to code the data with themes that were identified in the literature as well as coding new themes as they emerged during the coding process, as described in Section 3.5.1 below. The coded data was then analysed in relationship to these themes with additional codes added after additional reviews of the data, as described in Section 3.5.2 below.

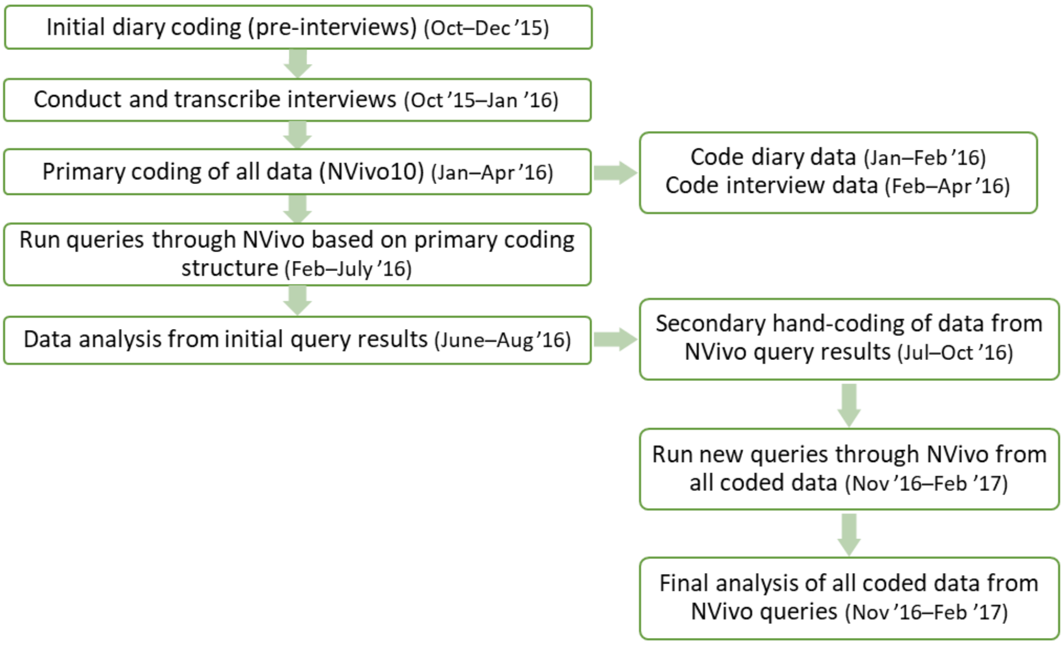

Figure 3: Overview of the data coding and analysis processes

Details of these coding and analysis processes are described in Sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 below.

3.5.1 Data coding

Data from participant diaries and interviews were treated in the same manner for both coding and analysis. However, they are identified separately when discussed in the findings sections of this thesis. All data collected were coded using NVivo10, qualitative data analysis software produced by QSR International.

The initial coding structure for this research was determined based on the themes that arose from the literature review. The themes, which formed the basis of both the theoretical framework for this study (see Table 3, Chapter 2, page 40) and interview schedule with the accompanying interview grid (see Appendix G), were added to the NVivo software as codes at the start of the data coding process. For example, the overarching theme of “interactions” formed the basis for a top-level code of “interactions” with additional codes for “like, favourite” and “commenting”.

During the coding process, data was coded using this existing set of codes whilst at the same time codes were added as they emerged from the data. For example, under the initial code of “interactions” data was also coded as “like as a bookmark” and “interaction desired” where the data was related to these practices. Content analysis was not included in the coding of data. Instead, the focus was on the *practices* related to sharing information online and the general categories of information shared, but not the specific content of the information. See Appendix I for a list of codes.

The same coding structure and process was used for both the participant diaries and interview data. Data was coded with the initial codes derived from the literature review whilst adding further codes as they emerged during this process. Two additional codes were used to distinguish between the two overarching themes of this research to distinguish between (1) data related to how participants build and manage their own reputations ("self") and (2) data related to the reputational evaluations of others ("others"). Some data were coded as both self and others. For example, where participants spoke about evaluating others based on similarities or differences to the participants' own practices.

After the data were coded in NVivo10, queries were run using the initial coding structure, creating reports based on research themes. These reports were then printed out along with the relevant codes. At this time, a manual review of the codes within each report was conducted. Here, the codes were verified and further annotated within the report, and helped to determine if further queries and reports were required. For example, a report printed in relation to RQ3 and evaluations of others based on data coded as "Insights into Others" (see Appendix J) helped to visualise the ways in which "everyday life" information sharing practices led to generally positive reputational evaluations by the participants in this study (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2.1).

The manual review process also considered a series of reports together to determine if there were larger patterns of information behaviour using worksheet with participants' names. For example, several reports were created related to RQ2 and information censorship through deleting or editing content after it had been shared (see Chapter 5, Section 5.3.4). These were then notated on a worksheet to show the motivations for these practices and to determine which motivations were most cited for different information practices (see Appendix K). This review also helped to confirm the number of participants who discussed different information practices and related motivations, as shown in the participant data tables in the three findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6).

The physical copies of these reports meant that data could be easily compared with similar themes. This allowed for themes to be combined where they were deemed to be more closely related than originally thought or divided into sub-themes.

This secondary coding also provided an opportunity to become more familiar with the data. This meant that finding connections between different social media practices during the data analysis stage of this research was a smoother process.

3.5.1.1 Types of reputational evaluations for coding

The reputational evaluations considered in this study were coded into three general categories: neutral, positive, and negative. Data was coded as "neutral" based on participants' determination that a piece of information was not important or did not influence an evaluation. "Positive" codes were given to data where participants specifically noted that they felt positively towards an individual based on the information shared or when the information itself elicited positive thoughts. Finally, data was coded as "negative" when participants explicitly remarked that a piece of information made them think negatively about the individual sharing the information or when the information itself created negative thoughts.

3.5.2 Data analysis

Data for this study was analysed based on the coded themes from the literature as well as those themes that were coded as they emerged from the data. The initial stages of this process involved gaining a familiarity with the data and relevant codes through re-playing audio recordings and re-reading interview and diary transcripts.

This familiarity with the data allowed for queries to be run in NVivo10 that pulled similarly coded data into reports. Queries were run through the analysis software to determine the frequency of codes and the relationships between the different codes and themes that they represented. The reports that were developed from these queries were used to highlight the findings from the data which were then considered along with the broader themes that had emerged from the literature review. The analysed data from the reports formed the basis for findings chapters related to the first three research questions (Chapters 4, 5, and 6).

Where findings were determined to be at odds with the literature, or indeed not present in the literature, a further review of the data was conducted to ensure the coding structure and related reports were accurate as they related to the data sets for this study. This included conducting word searches within the full data set. For example, the word “persona” was searched within a query related to naming conventions and the use of pseudonyms and anonymous accounts. By manually comparing reports from different queries to determine further relationships between themes, further context and understandings of the data were determined.

It was this process of cross-checking the findings from the data with the literature that helped to confirm the findings. This process also helped to build on the discussion related to the findings, and this doctoral investigation as a whole.

3.5.2.1 Platforms considered in this research

Much like the pilot study, the main study for this doctoral investigation focused on a limited number of social media platforms, as described and defined in Chapter 1, Table 1. Whilst participants were not asked to focus on specific platforms in the course of their diaries or interviews, the primary platforms discussed were Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Whilst other platforms were discussed by participants in the course of data collection, they did not present social media practices that varied from those practices discussed in relation to the primary platforms. It is possible that the focus on these platforms is due to participant recruitment taking place on those platforms.

3.6 Presentation of findings

The findings in this study are presented according to the first three research questions (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5.1), each presented in a separate chapter. These findings were based on the qualitative data queries and reports that were run during the data analysis stage of this study, as described in Section 5.3 above. The fourth and final research question is addressed in the discussion chapter (Chapter 7). The decision to frame the results in this way was made because the narration of the findings were best displayed in this manner to avoid redundancy.

It was also decided to consider diary and interview data in tandem. This is because the diaries were used as part of the interview guides, which linked much of the data together. However, the different data sources are noted in the course of the findings.

Where the findings include the direct use of participant data, line numbers from interview and diary transcripts are provided in parentheses. For example, (Amanda: 345-356) or (Scott, diary: 56-67). In instances where the original data has been edited for clarity, grammar, or anonymisation, the altered text is displayed in square brackets. For example, “I seen that Tiffany updated her status” would be edited to read “I [saw] that [she] updated her status”.

During the recruitment process (see Section 3.4.2.1), the assumption was that findings would be presented based on generation groupings. However, it was determined that the different groups were too similar in their social media practices to handle them separately. Because of that, data from all 45 participants are considered together within each of the three findings chapters.

3.7 Conclusion

The methods described in this chapter helped to produce a rich data set for analysis. This was in part due to the ease of participant reflections during the initial diary keeping process and the interviews. The high quality of the data collected during this study helped to successfully analyse the information for the production of the findings. These are shared in the following three chapters.

Chapter 4: Information practices used to build identity online

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis and interpretation of data for the first of four research questions (RQ1), "How do individuals use information to build identities for themselves online?" This chapter is organised in three sections, each related to a different aspect of building identity online. These are:

(1) The **creation and use of online personas** (Section 4.2), including an examination of three broad information practices that participants use for the portrayal of online personas or aspects of participants' identities;
(2) **The use of anonymity and pseudonyms** (Section 4.3) through information sharing – or concealment – practices, as well as some of the reasons behind these practices; and
(3) The **blurring or merging together of information** (Section 4.4) in relation to identities or personas related to private and professional lives, as well as online and offline environments.

4.2 Building identities and the deployment of personas using online information

The findings of this research reveal that the act of building an identity using information online – or multiple personas – is predominately based on participants' offline identities. Their social media use is an extension of their everyday lives. The exception to this is the deployment of *anonymous* identities, which is explored in Section 4.3.2. Thirty-seven of the participants reported the portrayal of *aspects* of their identity that represent their *overall* identity, i.e. different personas (as defined in Chapter 1, Table 1), when sharing information on social media. The remaining eight participants claimed that they present one consistent identity online, which reflects their singular offline identity.

There are three broad groups into which participants can be categorised in regards to how they build identities or personas online. These are the:

(1) The *unintentional* showcasing of different personas, i.e. aspects of identity;
(2) The *intentional* showcasing of different personas, i.e. aspects of identity (even if this is not considered to be a different identity); and
(3) The *intentional* representation of one identity that is the same online and offline, and across platforms, regardless of audience.

The largest of these subsets comprises those who are *unintentionally* showcasing different personas (27). A further 10 participants intentionally showcase different personas whilst the remaining eight portray only one identity (see Table 7 below).

Identity-building practice	**Number**	**Names of participants**
Unintentionally showcasing different personas	27	Alan, Alison, Amanda, Andrew, Callum, David, Emma, Fiona, Gillian, Hannah, Hazel, Heather, Helen, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Kelly, Laura, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Rachel, Roger, Rosemary, Stephen, and Yvonne
Intentionally showcasing different personas	10	Adrian, Colin, Donna, Fraser, Karen, Liam, Natalie, Nicola, Rebecca, and Sharon
Intentionally representing a single identity, online and offline	8	Craig, Diane, Kerry, Kevin, Scott, Susan, Wendy, and Zoe

Table 7: Categories of identity and persona building practices

The information practices deployed by the participants in these groups vary depending on the platform or perceived audience. These differences are generally based on the ways in which participants view the blurring or merging together of their private and professional lives and/or their online and offline environments. Whilst some of these practices are related to building or showcasing personas, the main findings related to issues of blurring are reported in Section 4.4. The different subsets are explained below.

4.2.1 The unintentional presentation of multiple personas through information sharing practices

Most of the participants in this study (27 of the 45) are *unintentionally* portraying different personas for themselves (see Table 7). These personas are based on participants' private and professional lives or their online and offline environments. The information sharing practices which create these personas can vary based on the social media platform and the perceived audience. These practices are generally undertaken as part of participants' efforts to build and manage their *reputations*, as discussed in Chapter 5.

All 45 participants spoke about *how they manage information* when asked about building identities online. However, the management of information was especially important to these 27 participants. Here, participants discuss the idea of separating out information based on *the appropriateness for the platform or the audience*, but not with regards to their own identities. For example, when asked about the process of building an online identity, Amanda shared how she manages her information practices by stating that her "way of managing it is doing things quite separately knowing that they will have an impact on each other. [What] my friends think of the work I do and what my colleagues think of my home life, I try to keep separate". Although Amanda feels that she only has one identity, she recognises that her information sharing practices showcase different aspects of that identity, thus effecting "different opinions" about her in her private and professional lives (Amanda: 3-17). Heather also "curates" different "versions of [herself]" by sharing different types of information based on the social media platforms and audiences. However, she is happy to share information across different platforms or audiences if she thinks the information is relevant. Heather explained that the different versions are "all one in the same and they're all part of the same person" and that she feels "there are different parts of my life that are relevant to different audiences … they're all the same person … and I'd be quite happy to talk about to other professional connections about [private hobbies] if I thought it was relevant" (Heather: 474-484).

The majority of the participants in this group (25) are sharing information in a way that may impact how their identities and reputations are viewed by others, but they are thinking about *platforms and audiences* in the first instance. However, two participants (Jennifer and Yvonne) first consider whether the information is relevant to *their own interests*, rather than its appropriateness for either the platform or audience. Jennifer stated that her reason for this is that "people follow you [because of your interests] … I want to make sure the content is relevant to what I'm interested in" (Jennifer: 96-102). Similarly, Yvonne shares information based on her professional interests and accomplishments on LinkedIn solely for building her professional presence online. She also uses Facebook to maintain personal relationships with offline connections, but shares only the information needed to maintain those relationships. Although Yvonne shares different types of information on the two platforms, she does this for her own desire to compartmentalise areas of her life. Whilst she does not do this to intentionally showcase different personas or identities for different audiences, Yvonne is aware that there is "a difference" between her private and professional "domains" (Yvonne: 8-14, 51-59, 522-526).

All of the participants in this group use some level of censorship in determining the information that they will or will not share. This plays at least some part in how their identities are showcased online. However, these practices are undertaken by participants for the purposes of *reputation building* and are discussed in Chapter 5.

4.2.2 The intentional presentation of multiple personas through information sharing practices

The use of information to *intentionally* showcase different personas was discussed by 10 participants (see Table 7). This intentional portrayal of multiple personas is viewed as a way of managing reputations online, and all 10 of these participants use different online platforms to share professional and private information as a way to build or manage reputation (see Chapter 5). However, only seven of those do so with the express intent of creating different personas *to delineate between their private and professional identities*. The remaining three participants create multiple *private* personas. By managing their private personas in this way, these three participants are *indirectly* creating a divide between their private and professional lives. With the exception of Fraser, who creates multiple private personas, none of these participants are using one persona to conceal another.

The intentional portrayal of different *professional* personas is a way to present a professional front. However, it is generally understood that the divide between private and professional personas is “fuzzy” and that there is likely to be some level of blur. Several information sharing practices are undertaken to build and manage these different personas. At the most basic level, these 10 participants use different social networking platforms to share information related to either their private or professional lives. For example, Nicola deploys two “different personas” that match up with her private and professional presences. She does this by using her Facebook and Instagram accounts for her “[private] online presence” whilst her Twitter and LinkedIn accounts are used for her “professional online presence” (Nicola: 3-12).

This divide is maintained even though participants are aware that some people merge their private and professional identities into one account. For example, Donna explained that she tries to have “two separate personas online”, one private and professional, even though she believes it is “not really very trendy at the moment”. She maintains her Facebook account for her private persona whilst LinkedIn, Twitter, and her organisation’s blog are used to showcase her professional persona. Whilst Donna believes that most people merge their private and professional lives together, she is “not very comfortable doing that”. Similarly, Rebecca keeps her private and professional identities separate by using Facebook for her private life and Twitter for her professional one. Rebecca also maintains an account on Instagram that she refers to as “the one in the middle”. This account allows Rebecca to merge her private and professional personas (Rebecca: 328-330).

A hybrid between these two practices is that of creating separate personas whilst being aware that one person may have access to more than one of them. For example, Sharon creates separate professional and private personas, in part because of her role as a “communications expert”. She does this by using Facebook for her private persona whilst showcasing her professional persona on Twitter and LinkedIn. She is also aware that “people are seeing both” personas regardless of her efforts. Because of this awareness, Sharon is also very cautious about the amount and type of information she shares (Sharon: 7-20).

Maintaining different personas on different platforms is the norm for this group of 10 participants. However, three participants also maintain multiple accounts on the *same* platform as a way to distinguish between their professional and private personas. For Adrian and Karen this is done by maintain two Facebook accounts: one for a professional persona or "brand" and a second account for sharing a "private persona" (Adrian: 3-10, 47-49; Karen: 3-11). Colin, on the other hand, keeps his private and professional identities separate by managing two separate Twitter accounts. One of the accounts is for sharing professional interests and other work-related information whilst the other is used when he wants to "be a wee bit more irreverent". However, he is aware that several people from his professional life follow this second, private-life Twitter persona (Colin: 318-326).

Whilst the primary motivation for the intentional portrayal of different personas is based on a desire to present different professional and private personas, three participants use information to create different personas in an effort to showcase *multiple private personas*. This creation of separate private personas is a way of sharing different aspects of participants' identity. For example, Liam explained that different persons are a way to "play different parts" and that by portraying different personas his "online [persona] can be a bit fantastic … kind of exaggerated" compared to that of his offline persona (Liam: 441-447). Natalie views the different personas as a way to share information that showcases her hobbies or different personality aspects of her offline identity (Natalie: 94-101). Fraser, on the other hand, uses two separate accounts on Facebook as a way of separating out what he views as his "public persona" – which is based on a public image he holds through family connections – and his "private persona" which allows him to present his "real" self. Fraser's private persona uses an anonymous name accessible to only select people. This allows him to share information and interact with close friends without having to manage his public persona (Fraser: 3-16; 39-44).

4.2.3 The intentional representation of a single identity through information sharing practices

Whilst the portrayal of different personas is the norm for participants in this study, eight participants are intentionally representing a single identity online that matches their offline identities (see Table 7). Further, with the exception of Kerry, this group of participants believe that they are very open about the information that they share, and that their offline and online identities are the same. Kerry's practices vary slightly from the main group as she does obscure *some* identifiable online information. However, she does so with the knowledge that people will be able to identify her if they already know her – even when she uses an anonymous account – and she does not view this as the creation of a second identity or persona.

The idea of a singular identity is viewed as a need to always be the same person and to portray identities as they are in "real life" (Kevin: 109-121). This group of participants are deliberate in their information practices and intentions to have only "one identity" which is viewed as a matter of boundaries. These boundaries are viewed as either intentionally set or as existing because of the "blurred" nature of online environments. For example, Diane believes her boundaries are "ridiculous" and does not give any strategic thought to what or how she posts online (Diane: 51-53). Similarly, Zoe explained that there is "so much blurring" between her online and offline environments that she "can't think of them as being separate" (Zoe: 253-263).

Despite this group's intentions to represent themselves each with a single identity, it is recognised that others might view them as having multiple personas. Craig captured this sentiment when he said:

> I believe in always being the same person and not presenting a different version of yourself to different people. So I guess [my identity] all kind of rolled up into one thing. I do always consider that they might see me in a different way – they might see me as Craig or they might see me as an employee of X Company. But it is generally me, whether it's a work or non-work me (Craig: 17-24).

4.3 Identity and the use of pseudonyms and anonymous accounts

Anonymity and pseudonyms can be used in place of "real names" and are common in online environments, despite attempts to encourage or mandate the use of real names as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1). Approximately half of the participants (21 of 45) in this study currently use some form of an alternative name for at least some of their online interactions. Pseudonyms are the most common form of alternative names used by these participants, as shown in Table 8 below.

Participants spoke about anonymous accounts as those accounts that are designed to mask the account holder's true offline identity. On the other hand, they discussed pseudonyms as names other than a person's "real name" but the general understanding was that pseudonyms are not designed to completely mask an identity from all people.

Practice	Number	Names of participants
Uses pseudonyms (including usernames or "handles")	18	Adrian, Amanda, Colin, David, Donna, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Heather, Joanne, Kerry, Liam, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Rebecca, Sharon, and Yvonne
Currently uses anonymous account	4	Alan, Fiona, Kerry, Natalie
Used anonymous account in the past	3	Helen, Jennifer, Wendy
Considered anonymous account, but did not create one	2	Alison and Heather

Table 8: Participant use of anonymity and pseudonyms

4.3.1 The use of pseudonyms

Eighteen of the participants in this study use pseudonyms for their social media accounts (see Table 8), including Kerry who also uses an anonymous account. All of these participants view their pseudonyms as associated with their "real" identities – either directly or indirectly – through profile or "bio" descriptions, links to other online content managed by the participant, the content and information shared within that account, or because the pseudonym contains at least some part of the participant's real name. For example, Rebecca maintains a social networking profile with a username that does not relate to her real name. However, Rebecca feels that her profile picture is clearly representative of her "real" self and is not meant to represent a "separate identity", allowing people who know her to identify the account as hers (Rebecca: 350-351). Joanne, on the other hand, maintains a professional blog that does not contain her real name but that links directly to both her LinkedIn and professional Twitter accounts, allowing people access to her unmasked identity (Joanne: 187-189).

Pseudonyms are generally deployed by using a variation of a participant's "real name" or by creating a "username" – which may or may not include part of a "real name". However, these naming conventions are not necessarily considered to be pseudonyms by the participants, but rather they can be viewed as an extension of an individual's "real" identity, especially when the deployment of this type of pseudonym is standard protocol on a platform, such as Twitter[16]. For example, Gillian and Fraser both have "preferred" usernames, which they refer to as "handles" (Gillian: 551-555; Fraser: 506-511). Both of these participants attempt to register their preferred usernames for their social media accounts, which link directly to their real names. Gillian explained that this is because having the same "consistent social media handle" creates a "suite of information" about her (Gillian: 551-558).

In contrast, three participants chose to deploy username-based pseudonyms because they are considered standard protocol within specific online communities. In these cases, the decision to create usernames is not due to a desire to create an extension of an offline identity, but one of necessity based on platform norms (David: 408-413; Kerry: 554-561; Liam: 377-381). However, these participants do recognise that these usernames help to contribute to their identities and reputations, even if that is not their intent.

Two of the participants who deploy usernames as pseudonyms do so to create a professional brand, whilst also identifying as an individual person. First, Adrian created a username based on the name of his business, as that is his primary reason for using

[16] Twitter profiles are directly connected to an account holder's unique username or handle and may or may not contain the user's real name. For example, @[real name], @[initials plus numbers], or @[random].

social media. However, he makes it clear that he is the "real person" behind the business name through the content he shares. He feels that it is important to be identifiable and states that "nothing [is] anonymous in my life" (Adrian: 395-401). Second, Heather deploys a username on a photography sharing website that does not reveal her real name. She obscures this information in part because she does not know who might be viewing her photographs and what their motivation for connecting with her might be. However, she does not feel that this is an anonymous account as she does not actively try to obscure her identity (Heather: 501-511).

When asked about the use of pseudonyms, eight participants discussed the use *alterations* to their "real names". This included the use of maiden names or other alternative surnames and the use of first or last initials for all of part of a name. For example, Donna explained that she uses her maiden name on her professional accounts, as that is the name she is known by in her professional life (Donna: 417-420). Similarly, Natalie pseudonymously used her *mother's* maiden name to differentiate between her private and professional Twitter accounts. More recently, she started using her own name for both accounts (Natalie: 20-22).

Two participants specifically spoke about using initials for their Twitter usernames as a way of preventing professional contacts from finding their accounts. Here, Michelle uses her first name and the first initial of her surname for her *private* Twitter account so that professional connections are unable to contact her on that account, whilst maintaining a separate professional Twitter account with her full name (Michelle: 350-355). Joanne also uses a combination of initials and her name to create a pseudonym for her private Twitter account so that people from her professional life cannot find or connect with her (Joanne: 219-222).

Whilst most of the participants spoke of pseudonyms as *alterations* of their names, two participants (Fraser and Yvonne) have created pseudonyms that are unrelated to their offline identities, rather than alterations of their real names. They do this to try to ensure that no one can find them with those accounts unless they have specifically shared the name used for those accounts. Unlike an anonymous account, however, they are open about who they are with their connections on those accounts and are still portraying themselves as their offline selves. Fraser, who also deploys a username-style pseudonym, uses his pseudonym-based Facebook account with a “fake name” in addition to an account with his “real name” so that he is able to hide his private views from an otherwise public profile. His “fake name” profile showcases a freer and more “private” persona, whilst his “real name” profile is more professional. He joked that, as a result, he has a “split personality on Facebook” (Fraser: 3-16). Conversely, Yvonne only manages one Facebook account and prefers the “anonymity” of a pseudonym so that people from her professional life cannot find her on that platform. She does not alter her personality or how she interacts with others, despite not using her real name (Yvonne: 10-14).

In addition, two of the participants in this study obscure some of the information they share in relation to their online identities, but do not alter their names or use pseudonyms. First, Amanda does this by using a photograph or “avatar” of flowers instead of her own face, in part because she was uncomfortable with having her image online when she started her social media accounts (Amanda: 496-505). Second, Lynn withholds some personal information about herself, such as demographic details, from her online accounts whilst still using her real name (Lynn: 395-398). These, and similar, information sharing practices are discussed further in Chapter 5.

4.3.2 The use of anonymous accounts

Only four participants in this study currently use profiles or social media accounts that they consider *anonymous*, meaning accounts that do not connect back to an offline identity (see Table 8). However, only two of those four participants (Kerry and Natalie) use anonymous accounts to *intentionally mask their identities online*. These anonymous accounts are actively used for some of their personal social media use – although they each also maintain profiles that are linked directly to their “real selves”. Kerry’s use of anonymous accounts is based on an aspect of her “real name”. She has found that her surname can be used as a gender-neutral username which, paired with ambiguous details and profile images, offers her the ability to share her opinions or speak up for someone else without fear (Kerry: 83-104). Natalie uses what she calls a “ridiculously anonymous” account to share “unusual aspects” of her personality. The account links to her real name and email address, which are not publicly available, and some close friends know that the account is hers. However, she feels that her anonymity is secure (Natalie: 49-66).

Alan and Fiona – the remaining two participants who actively use anonymous accounts – use them for practical purposes without a specific intent to create or present alternative identities for themselves. Alan uses anonymous accounts for testing the security settings of online platforms as well as different levels of user permissions and access (Alan: 404-409). Fiona uses an anonymous account for selling and purchasing from eBay (Fiona: 351-352). Whilst they do not consider these accounts as part of their identities, they do consider them to be active, anonymous accounts that are part of their online lives.

In addition to those participants who currently use anonymous accounts, three participants (Helen, Jennifer, and Wendy) spoke about their use of anonymous accounts in the past. However, those anonymous identities are no longer used and are not considered by the participants to be part of their current identity building practices.

Helen used anonymous names for parenting-related forums in the past to protect herself as well as her children. Part of her reasoning for anonymity was as awareness that, even in a private forum, “things can come up on Google” (Helen: 441-453). Jennifer and Wendy used their anonymous accounts for maintaining public blogs, but each for a different reason. Jennifer used her anonymity because “I didn’t want the things that I was writing about to come back to me personally” (Jennifer: 543-546). Wendy kept an anonymous blog about her *previous* professional life. Because she wrote stories which were of a sensitive nature, she felt that her own anonymity would help to conceal the identities of the people she worked with. To further protect the identities of others, she wrote stories in a generalised manner patching stories together from a variety of situations. Wendy no longer uses anonymous accounts, as she decided she did not want to be “anyone else except for me online” (Wendy: 109-127).

A further two participants (Alison and Heather) spoke about how they *had considered* using anonymous accounts, but decided against it. In Alison's case, she deliberated about using an anonymous profile to seek and share mental health related information. Instead, she refrains from sharing sensitive information on her social media accounts (Alison: 69-73, 311-312). Heather's decision against using an anonymous account was made when she was choosing a username on Twitter for the first time. She did not have a firm sense of why she needed to be anonymous which made her decide that she wants to "be associated" with herself (Heather: 491-511).

The majority of the participants (36) noted that they do not use, and have never considered using, anonymous identities online because it is not of interest to them. Only two of those participants (Emma and Jacqueline) spoke about having strong reasons for why they would not use anonymous accounts, each with connections to their overall reputations. For Emma, this was because of views of personal integrity. She stated that if she is not prepared to put her name to something, she would not share it (Emma: 421-423). Similarly, Jacqueline explained that she would want her thoughts and words to be attributed to her, and not to "someone anonymous" (Jacqueline: 501-503).

4.4 Identity and the blurring between private and professional personas and online and offline environments

As discussed in Section 4.2, the creation of identities and personas is largely based on participants' *offline identities*. Even when participants do not feel that they are creating separate identities, they are undertaking information practices to manage the overlap or merging together of different aspects of their lives. There are, however, some practices related to these areas of blurring that are *specific to the notion of identities and personas*. There are two primary categories of blurring, as they relate to identity, that are considered here. Those are the blurring between (1) private and professional information and (2) online and offline environments.

For those participants who feel that they are fully open online, the issue of blurring is not important as they do not feel a need to create a divide. For example, Diane merges all of her private and professional information sharing practices together into shared accounts. She feels that both her private and professional lives and her online and offline environments are too integrated to be viewed as distinct things (Diane: 187-189). Other participants, however, do make concerted efforts to either limit or eliminate the amount of blurring that happens in both of these areas. Scott, for example, will not connect with people from work online, as he prefers to keep his *private and professional lives* as separate as possible (Scott: 157-164), whilst Lynn is aware that there is overlap between the information shared in her *online and offline environments* even though she does not view them as the same thing (Lynn: 420-422).

As with the findings on identity building practices related to the deployment of personas (Section 4.2), these areas of blurring are closely related to the *reputation management* practices shared in Chapter 5. The findings related to these two areas of blurring *as they relate to identity* are shared below.

4.4.1 The blurring between private and professional lives

Many of the information practices outlined in the sections above are based on the differences in information sharing on different social media platforms and for different audiences. These practices are most often deployed to manage the levels of blurring between participants' professional and private lives. As discussed in Section 4.2, these information sharing practices are generally used to distinguish between professional and private identities or *personas*.

However, in general the participants in this study do not feel that they are intentionally building their identities through the management of this blurring. Instead, managing the blurring between private and professional lives is viewed as part of their *reputation management*. This is very similar to those participants who do not feel that they are actively building different personas online (Section 4.2.1) even though some of their practices might be viewed by others as persona building. For example, Heather feels that her private and professional lives are "quite closely linked" but acknowledges that she "curates" the information she shares carefully so that she is presenting "different versions" or personas of herself, depending on the audience (Heather: 474-475).

The participants who feel that they *are* intentionally managing the blurring between their private and professional lives also noted that they are intentionally building identities online (Section 4.2.2). Seven of the participants from that subgroup are represented here (Adrian, Colin, Donna, Fraser, Natalie, Nicola, and Sharon). The overall practices noted here are similar those discussed in Section 4.2.2. However, some participants view the management of this blurring as more important than simply showcasing different personas – it is also about managing the audience for different types of information that are shared. Fraser, for example, is adamant that "no colleagues must ever know" who he is in his private life, in part because it allows him to share information more freely (Fraser: 69-73). Others view the management of this blur more casually, and with more concern about their family and friends not being interested in information about their professional life (e.g. Natalie: 8-17; Nicola: 3-12).

There is an element of using different identities or personas to managing the blurring between participants' professional and private lives. However, the overall idea of using different identities to manage the blur is less important than information sharing practices that are viewed as building reputation. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.

4.4.2 The blurring between online and offline environments

Managing the blurring between online and offline environments is similar to managing the blurring between private and professional lives. From an identity standpoint, this blurring is generally related to how people represent themselves in one environment or the other.

All 45 participants feel that their online and offline environments blur together to at least some extent – and that they are portraying themselves as the same person most of the time, even if they are only sharing a single aspect of their identity or persona. For example, Kelly, who unintentionally presents multiple personas, explained that "I think people do need to understand that there's a definite overlap between online and offline. You can't think that people will see you one way offline and one way online. You've got to be the same person in both" (Kelly: 338-340). Even Liam and Natalie, who intentionally deploy different personas on some of their online accounts that do not represent their offline identities, as previously discussed, note a degree of blurring.

This presentation of the same identity across both online and offline environments is viewed as a matter of consistency. For example, Yvonne describes this as a desire "to be very consistent so that my offline and my online identity are very much one in the same" (Yvonne: 521-526) whilst Zoe, who intentionally presents a single identity both online and offline, feels that social media is "place where you can mix your offline life with your online life. I can't see that [they are] separate. We're so interlinked [with] the online world now" (Zoe: 353-363).

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that participants use online information to *present aspects of identity*, rather than to build or create identity in its own right. Here, identity is comprised of multiple personas that are showcased in a way that highlights different aspects of an individual's identity for different audiences.

The practices related to showcasing personas are generally undertaken to manage the blurring between both participants' professional and private lives and their online and offline environments. It is evident that these practices are part of an intentional effort to build and manage professional reputations, with private reputations being of less importance to the participants.

On the whole, the findings in this chapter show that the information practices related to identity are closely related to the ways in which participants use online information to *build and manage their reputations*, which is the focus of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: The use of online information to build and manage reputation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis and interpretation of data for the second of four research questions (RQ2), "How do individuals use online information to build and manage their reputations?" It is organised in three sections, each related to a different aspect of the building and management of reputation on the basis of online information shared on social media. These are:

(1) **Online information practices as they relate to personal reputation** (Section 5.2), including platform-based differences in information sharing practices, the creation of user-generated content and re-posting content that other people create, interactions with content, and linking online content to other individuals through the use of tags;
(2) **The censorship of online information** (Section 5.3), including platform-based censorship, the censorship of content creation and interactions, and limiting access to some information; and
(3) **The creation and maintenance of online connections** (Section 5.4), including how and if connections are created and the potential termination of these connections.

5.2 Online information practices as they relate to personal reputation

The ways in which online information is used to build and manage personal reputation encompass a range of practices. The four areas of information practices considered in this section. These are:

(1) Platform-based information sharing practices;
(2) Information sharing through online content;
(3) Information sharing through interactions with online content; and
(4) Information created by tagging individuals in online content.

5.2.1 Platform-based information sharing practices

All participants except for three (Helen, Rachel, and Zoe) manage profiles on more than one of the primary social networking sites considered in this research (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1), and post different content on the different platforms. Their practices are largely based on the type of platform (i.e. professional or private) or the perceived audience for the platform. The primary reason for this is to ensure that there is at least some level of distinction between both private and professional information, and between different aspects of participants' private lives. LinkedIn is viewed by all as a strictly professional platform where professional information is shared. Facebook is regarded as a platform for sharing predominantly private information, although professional information might also be posted on Facebook in some circumstances. Twitter, however, is considered to be both a professional and private platform, either by combining professional and private information on one account or by managing separate accounts. The majority of Twitter users in this study (29 of the 41) manage a single Twitter account that combines professional and private information. Of the remaining 12 participants, seven manage only one profile that is strictly for professional information, whilst five manage multiple accounts to allow for sharing professional and private information separately (see Table 9 below).

Twitter use	Number	Names
One combined account for private and professional use	29	Alan, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Craig, David, Diane, Donna, Fiona, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Heather, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Kelly, Kerry, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Scott, Sharon, Susan, and Wendy
One account for strictly professional use	7	Adrian, Amanda, Hazel, Kevin, Laura, Roger, and Rosemary
Multiple accounts for sharing private and professional information separately	5	Alison, Emma, Joanne, Natalie, and Stephen

Table 9: Twitter account usage related to the blurring between private and professional information sharing practices

These different practices can be illustrated first by Colin and Heather, who both post strictly professional content on LinkedIn and predominately private information on Facebook, whilst using Twitter as a mixture of private and professional information (Colin: 5-20; Heather: 4-39). The second practice illustrated is Michelle, who creates a divide by using Facebook and Twitter for sharing different types of private information. She explained this in her diary by stating "I express my Atheism and scepticism more strongly on Twitter than on Facebook, lest I 'offend' my older family members, so friends, and my mother-in-law" (Michelle, diary: 295-297).

The exception to maintaining a divide between platform-based professional and private information sharing practices is Diane, whose primary profile is on Twitter. Diane stated that she does not try to create a division between her private or professional lives, and stated that "My [lack of] boundaries are ridiculous; I [share] both [private and professional information] in the same [place]" (Diane: 51-52).

Thirty-eight of the 42 participants who maintain profiles on more than one platform use them on at least a weekly basis, with most (37) sharing information on different platforms based on their perceived purpose, i.e. for professional or private networking. However, a platform's purpose can change over time. For example, Wendy initially used Twitter for professional purposes and Facebook for private use. When she noticed that other people in her profession were using Facebook for professional use to at least some degree, she eventually began to connect with professional contacts on her private Facebook account. This was so that she did not miss out on opportunities to connect with professionals who might not use Twitter (Wendy: 319-341).

When blending private and professional information on a single platform, more consideration is given to the ways in which the shared information might impact participants' *professional* reputations rather than their *private* reputations. For example, Jennifer explained that she does not think much about information she shares before posting to Facebook, which she uses for private purposes, yet she is more cautious on Twitter. This is because she is connected with both current and former colleagues (including managers) on the Twitter. Jennifer stated that:

> [What information I share depends on] the type of platform I'm using and the type of audience that I'm engaging with and [my ulterior motives] … It is important to remember about your reputation and what people think of you from both a personal perspective [and] a professional point of view … [In a professional context] it is important to me to show and demonstrate that I have a knowledge and understanding about [these things] – whether it's in a personal or a professional capacity (Jennifer: 3-13).

5.2.2 Information sharing through online content

The main form of information sharing on social networking sites is that of posting online "content". Online content is created using different formats including text, images, videos, or links to external sources, and sometimes includes more than one of these elements. This section considers both user-generated content that is posted on the creator's own social networking profiles and content that is created by others that is then re-posted on the participant's profile.

5.2.2.1 Creating user-generated content

All 45 participants in this study post content that they have created. Forty-two participants spoke specifically about posting content online for the purpose of "sharing information". Information in this context was discussed the dissemination of a specific piece of news or knowledge. There are two primary reasons for posting content as a form of "information": (1) the information might be of specific interest to professional contacts or individuals with similar hobbies and interests, and (2) to bring current event stories (or "news") to the attention of others. There tends to be overlap between these reasons and participants generally spoke about them in parallel. This is especially true when the information is thought to be of specific relevance to others. The degree to which professional and private lives and interests overlap also has an impact on decisions to share (or not share) information. When participants feel that their professional lives or interests are an important part of their "whole self" identity, information sharing for professional or private reasons is difficult to distinguish. For example, Gillian stated that there is a considerable overlap in the information that she shares as relevant to both her professional and private lives. At times, this means that Gillian finds it hard to distinguish between the two (Gillian: 28-31).

To a lesser extent, content is posted specifically to share information with family or friends about everyday life. Five of the 42 participants spoke about sharing information in this way (Amanda, Andrew, Fraser, Kerry, and Michelle). For example, Kerry stated that she would share information about getting a new job on Facebook so that her family and friends were kept up to date about what was happening in her life (Kerry: 170-176).

Participants spoke about three broad categories of content that they create and post to their own social networking sites. These categories relate to (1) personal information and opinions, (2) casual or everyday life activities or situations, and (3) self-promotion, especially in regards to sharing information related to their professional lives.

Thirty-four participants talked in their interviews about creating content that shares "personal information". This was considered to be information about health and family life or opinions related to politics or social issues. This type of content is predominately posted on social media profiles that are considered private – as opposed to professional accounts – and might only be shared on *specific* private accounts, based on the perceived audiences for those accounts. For example, Donna avoids sharing "personal stuff and opinions" on LinkedIn or Twitter because they are "professional" spaces. Instead, that content is posted on her private Facebook account. She explained this by saying "[on] Facebook I am much more open because I can be me" (Donna: 33-36).

The most common form of personal information sharing, as discussed by 30 participants, is information related to personal health or family life. Information of this type is shared to keep family and friends informed or updated. Participants spoke about sharing these types of information in very broad terms, however, and did not discuss their detailed reasons for sharing. For example, Yvonne stated that she would share "[information] about moving house [or] going on holiday" as a way of "keeping in touch" so that she can "stay [on her connections'] radar" (Yvonne: 41-49) whilst Callum noted that he would share information about achievements because it is "a good way to get the message out to quite a lot of people all at once" (Callum: 4-8).

Seventeen of the 34 participants who discussed posting “personal information” spoke about sharing political and social views. The content of the information includes posts about current political figures (Fiona: 96-103), political ideals (Fraser: 81-96), and socially controversial campaigns (Emma: 300-310). As with other forms of personal information, participants opt to share their personal views on platforms that are deemed to be private. For example, Fraser explained that doing so allows him to “be much more forthright” and to avoid being “judged negatively” if he were to share that same information on his “public” accounts (Fraser: 39-44).

The second category of content creation is related to casual or everyday information. One-third of the participants (13) spoke about posting this type of information on their social media accounts. This kind of content generally highlights elements of participants’ private lives and is posted on profiles that tend to include some level of private information, such as Facebook or Twitter. The content of this kind of information varies, based on participants’ own classification of “casual” or “everyday”. For example, Fraser talked about posting casual or “fairly mundane updates” related to going out of town (Fraser: 94-96), whilst Emma spoke about sharing casual information about “going out to a rugby match” (Emma: 31-32). Other examples related to sharing casual or everyday information included Hannah “live-tweeting” reality television shows (Heather: 69-71) and Nicola sharing information in the form of photographs of her “craft projects” (Nicola: 48-55).

The third type of content considered here is that which is posted for the purposes of “self-promotion” or “creating a brand”. Fourteen participants spoke about sharing information in this way, specifically related to their professional personas. For Jacqueline, sharing this kind of information is seen as a “kind of mercenary thing” and that it is a good way for “as many people to see [the information] as possible” (Jacqueline: 424-429). Yvonne’s view on self-promotion is similar. She stated that it is “important that my [work] is visible, so promoting [it] is kind of important” (Yvonne: 4-8). Wendy looks at self-promotion as an “intentional” way of “branding” herself (Wendy: 180-182), as does Sharon who stated that she thinks “that [social media] is about an image … it’s brand you, not necessarily the real you” (Sharon: 165-167).

5.2.2.2 Re-posting content created by others

In addition to sharing information through the creation of original content, it is possible to re-post content that others have created. Twenty-eight participants in this study discussed using the "share" function on Facebook or the "re-tweet" option on Twitter as a way of "re-posting" content. This new content then becomes part of the participants' own suite of information.

The majority of these participants (22) re-post content primarily as a form of information sharing. This means that content is re-posted when it is deemed to be information that is relevant, important, or information that "people would like to know about" (Hazel: 72-73) in both their professional and private circles. At times, this re-posted content will include additional content to give context to the information being shared. For example, Natalie stated that she will "add a note as to why it might be interesting" (Natalie: 280-281).

Re-posting content as a way of sharing information is largely done to share the specific information found within the content. For example, James stated that he re-posts content that is related to his professional life when it is "something is particularly interesting in [the] field" (James: 144-147) whilst Jennifer said she tries to "curate" information that is "relevant" or to try to create interesting discussions around the content (Jennifer: 585-591). For Diane and Lynn, re-posting content as a form of information sharing is also about the ways that the information might impact their reputations. Diane explained this as wanting to "be a person who has got a lot of good information to share and [is] intelligent" (Diane: 74-75). Lynn, on the other hand, wrote in her diary that she will re-post "feminist and left-wing articles" so that her connections are "aware of [her] political and social leanings" (Lynn, diary: 20-24).

Within that same group of 22 participants, seven participants are also re-posting content as a way of intentionally aligning themselves with the original poster. For example, Gillian re-posts content that she believes will be "interesting to [her] network" whilst also signalling to the original poster that she is "reading" and "enjoying" their content (Gillian, diary: 102-107). Fraser views this as "one part of the game" even though he is sometimes "uncomfortable" if the alignment seems insincere (Fraser: 277-282). For two participants (Fraser and Roger) building an alignment through re-posting content is also viewed as a way creating an interaction with the original poster.

In addition to re-posting content as a form of information sharing, nine participants stated that they re-post "interesting" content because they think that their connections might also find the content to be interesting (Rachel: 116-117; Susan: 151-155). Three participants re-post interesting content in addition to re-posting content as a way of information sharing, whilst the remaining six participants only discussed re-posting content that they found interesting. David captured this group's reasons for re-posting interesting content when he stated: "If I find it sufficiently interesting to read all the way through, I will then [re-post it], almost as a way of saying thank you [because if] I found this interesting, other people might find it interesting" (David: 62-64).

5.2.3 Information sharing through interactions with online content

There are two primary forms of interactions considered in this section. The first of these interactions is commenting, which is sharing information in the form of a reply to online content. The second form of interaction is "liking" or "favouriting" online content. This form of interaction allows social media users to quickly interact with content by clicking an icon[17], which can act as a form of information. Although different platforms use different terminology, the term "like" is used to describe these interactions unless directly quoting participants[18, 19].

5.2.3.1 Interacting with content through comments

All participants interact with online content by posting comments, and they understand that these interactions are a form of information sharing. However, the practice is only undertaken as an *intentional* reputation-building activity by four

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[17] Facebook and LinkedIn allow users to "like" posts, which displays a "thumbs up" icon below the post, whilst Twitter uses the term "favourite" along with a red "heart" icon. Other social media sites use similar terminology and visuals.

[18] Participants in this study used three different terms when discussing "favouriting" content on Twitter. These were favourite, heart, and like. Twitter changed the icon associated with "favourites" from a star to a heart in late 2015.

[19] The only term used by participants related to Facebook and LinkedIn was "like", which was the only option available to participants during data collection. Facebook added additional "reactions" (Love, Haha, Wow, Sad, and Angry) in 2016, after data collection was completed.

participants (Diane, Jacqueline, Wendy, and Yvonne). For these participants, comments are used to build and enhance their *professional* reputations. Diane, whose primary platform is Twitter, comments in the form of replies because it is "polite" and wishes to ensure that her connections feel that she is aware of "what the etiquette is" (Diane: 400-408). Wendy also replies to Twitter "chats" regularly. She stated that she is "likely to chat with people who I think are going to be helpful and useful" in building her professional reputation (Wendy: 395-397). Further, Wendy uses Twitter comments as a way of "gaining new followers", noting that she "would rather [gain followers] by interacting with people who then want to follow me", acknowledging that it is "a bit of a reputational thing" (Wendy: 54-56, 58-59). Yvonne also uses comments as a way to encourage her connections to continue sharing information that is of interest to her and to ensure they continue to engage "in a similar fashion" (Yvonne: 190-194).

For Jacqueline and Yvonne, commenting can also be a way of actively *protecting* their reputation. This is especially true when comments are made as follow-up replies to previous comments. These replies are made to clarify previous comments which might have been misunderstood. For example, Jacqueline discussed replying to comments "quite quickly" when someone seems to have misunderstood the content in her original post. This is because she wants to ensure that other people do not interpret her post based on a "misunderstanding" (Jaqueline: 9-17). In addition to replies to correct misunderstandings, Yvonne will reply to comments when she thinks the comment is "unhelpful" to the conversation about the post. For Yvonne, this is a deliberate part of her reputation management, in part because she wants others to know that she "pays attention" to the comments people make on her content (Yvonne: 168-181, 432-441).

Although only four participants *intentionally* manage their reputations through the use of comments, the remaining participants (41) understand that comments *may* impact their reputation. However, for these participants, reputation is not a primary concern in decisions of whether or not to comment. Instead, the motivation to comment stems from a desire to respond to the information that has been shared. This is especially true when participants feel that they are able to "add to the conversation". Indeed, commenting on content as a way adding to the conversation is the primary motivation for 34 participants. For example, Hannah stated that she comments when she thinks that someone has done something “brilliant” because she feels that it is “kind of a conversational thing” (Hannah: 441-444). For others, the decision to comment as part of a conversation stems from the levels of connection that they feel to the content in the original post or in the comments. For example, Fiona explained that she will comment when the content “strikes a chord of mindfulness”, whether or not she agrees with the content (Fiona: 114-116). Similarly, David noted that he comments when the content in a post has made him “think more deeply” or that makes him “want to dig deeper” as he wants to “generate an online conversation” (David: 181-184).

Six of the 34 participants also use comments as a way of adding information that is relevant to the conversation. This is different from simply adding to a conversation in that the comments are made with a specific desire to direct others to a particular piece of information. Craig explained his motivation for commenting with information as a “feeling” that the information “should be made available to a wider audience” and that he was “contributing to [the information] being distributed more widely” (Craig: 171-173).

A further nine participants (Alison, Andrew, Fraser, Gillian, Heather, Rachel, Stephen, Wendy, and Zoe) stated that they will comment on content as a way to show support or to acknowledge the achievements and life events of others. Seven of these participants have additional motivations for commenting, whilst two participants (Heather and Rachel) noted that showing support is the *only* reason they leave comments on someone else’s content. Heather explained that she only comments if someone “had some big life event like having a baby or getting married”. She tends to “step up for the big stuff … but [does not like to] comment willy-nilly” (Heather: 205-208). Andrew, on the other hand, comments with “congratulations, I’m pleased for you” on posts about having babies or getting married, as well as posts that have “anything to do with [exams]”. He also likes to comment with good wishes when someone posts that they are “having a down day or that’re not feeling good” (Andrew: 147-151). Like Andrew, Stephen also comments on content if he thinks “someone is having problems” because he wants “to be supportive” (Stephen: 443-444).

5.2.3.2 Interacting with content through likes

Thirty-nine of the participants in this study discussed interacting with online content by "liking" posts that have been created by others. The majority of those (29) like content for specific reasons. The two most common reasons stated for *intentionally* liking content are (1) to acknowledge the individual who has posted the content (23 participants) and (2) to acknowledge the content that has been posted (14 participants). Eleven of these participants like content for both reasons.

Using likes to acknowledge an individual is often due to a lack of desire to comment on content. For example, Colin stated that "I usually [like content] as sort of a way of an acknowledgement, so it's a way of saying I've read it and I kind of acknowledge [you], [but] I don't feel the need to reply with a comment" (Colin: 111-113). In a similar manner, Zoe likes other people's content as a way to "show a bit of support". She explained that "It's that kind of slight interaction [that says] I've seen that, I know you're doing that ... That's kind of my interaction" (Zoe: 27-32).

Similarly, Donna and Linda discussed liking images as part of a larger photo album on Facebook. Whilst there is a desire to acknowledge connections by liking content, they do not wish to like every image. Instead, Donna will only like the main photo album, as opposed to every photograph (Donna: 85-88) whilst Linda is more likely to "look for one [image] in particular that I can truthfully 'like' … it's [about] making sure that they're seeing that I'm appreciating what they're [posting]" (Linda: 415-419).

For those participants who use likes as a way to acknowledge content, 11 (of 14), are also motivated to acknowledge the individual sharing content. However, these participants did not feel that acknowledging content in this fashion constitutes an agreement with the content. Laura explained this when she stated:

> It's [because] it's so damn easy just to click 'like'. ... It's actually a very passive … If someone posted an article and I thought, 'I like the article, I enjoyed reading it, I agree with some of the sentiments,' but [I do not] agree with it quite enough, or find it quite interesting enough to [re-post], I'll like it. … I'll do that for articles, I'll do that for photos, I'll do that for status updates (Laura: 772-783).

Of the 29 participants who intentionally interact with content using likes, only seven do so as a way to intentionally build or manage their reputations. For these participants, liking content is a way to signal to their connections that they have either viewed or felt positively towards the content.

Two of those seven (Scott and Zoe) use likes to help manage their *private* reputations. By liking their connections' posts, they are being seen to be engaged with the content. For Scott, this is a way to show his connection that he is "there" (Scott: 87-91). Zoe spoke about similar reasons when she said that "liking people's [content] … shows a bit of support", something that she further noted might save "awkward" conversation if she were to encounter her connection in an offline environment (Zoe: 110-115).

A further five participants use likes as a way to help build or manage their *professional* reputations. Gillian wrote in her diary that she will like content that has been posted by her director as a way to "signal to him that I am reading his tweets and that I enjoyed his blog post" (Gillian, diary: 102-104). Jacqueline noted a similar motivation in her diary when she discussed interacting with content from her personal Facebook account (as opposed to the one she manages on behalf of her organisation). She explained that she "wanted it to be known that is was me [interacting with] these posts" (Jacqueline, diary: 26-29). Similarly, Karen stated that she likes certain types of online content because they "are the kind of posts I would like to be seen reading" (Karen, diary: 10-11). However, Alison noted a slightly different reputational motivation for liking content in that she will interact with content out of obligation. She explained that when a colleague posted content that "everybody was liking" she thought she "better [like it] as well" (Alison: 154-158). Yvonne uses likes as a way to intentionally build her reputation in the same manner as she uses comments, as discussed above.

Interacting with online content through likes is not always undertaken with considered intention. Ten of the participants who discussed liking content said that the act was not done for a specific reason other than feeling positively towards the content. For example, Callum explained that it would depend on how he felt at any given time (Callum: 123-124). Susan noted a similar sentiment and described herself as a "serial liker" who feels that likes are a "quick" form of interaction, especially on Twitter where content is "short [and] sharp" (Susan: 146-149).

Even for those participants who have intentional motivations for liking content acknowledge that this form of interaction is often practised without intention. In these cases, content is liked quickly and without much though given to the process. For example, Gillian explained that liking content is "probably the most kind of ad hoc, immediate thing" that she does (Gillian: 215-216) whilst Amanda stated that the practice of liking content saves time as it does not "require much thought" and can be done "quite quickly" (Amanda: 525-529).

The findings in this section reveal that the majority of the participants (36) are not using comments or likes to interact with information as an *intentional* way to build or manage their reputations. However, by interacting with online content, they are adding to the suite of online information that can be used to evaluate their reputations by others. This means that, even without intentionally managing their reputations through interactions, participants may still be contributing to their reputations by commenting on or liking online content.

5.2.4 Information created by tagging individuals in online content

The last form of information sharing considered in this section is the practice of "tagging" an individual in a piece of online content. This is done by hyperlinking another individual's social networking profile (for example, "tagging" someone on Facebook or "mentioning" someone on Twitter or LinkedIn) when creating online content. By tagging another individual, the person is linked to the tagged content. This creates a piece of information that connects the content, the individuals tagged within the content, and the creator of the content.

The majority of participants in this study (37) tag other individuals in online content, with approximately half of these (18) using tags as an intentional form of reputation management. There are four primary reasons that participants use tags: (1) as a way to ensure the tagged individual views information that is also intended for a wider audience, (2) to create an alignment between themselves and the tagged individual, (3) as a way to bring information to the attention of specific individuals, at times bypassing a wider audience, and (4) to identify individuals in photographs. The first three are most likely to have intentional reputational motivations. The last reason – tagging photographs – is more likely to be done because it is a convention of the platform being used.

Tagging individuals as a way to ensure that information is viewed (20 participants) can be thought of as both a form of social interaction as well as a way to build or manage reputation. For example, Callum is one of five participants that uses tags as social conventions. He stated that he will tag friends in a “funny video” to “make sure they see it” simply because it is a social interaction (Callum: 131-135). Fifteen participants viewed the use of tags as a way to build or manage their reputations. For example, Rebecca stated that she might tag someone on Twitter as a way to signal that they might be interested in something that she has read, which in turn helps to signal her own interests to a wider audience (Rebecca: 112-116, 125-127).

Thirteen of those participants who use tags to ensure information is being viewed by the tagged individuals are simultaneously using those tags to create an alignment between themselves and the person that they tag. This is predominately done as a way to build and manage the participants’ professional reputation. For example, Amanda discussed how she will tag potential collaborators on Twitter. She stated that “they are key sort of influential people [and] if I’m tweeting something that I think either they’d be interested in, or I would like them to know that I am interested in it … I would purposefully [tag] them” (Amanda: 126-130, 135-138).

The use of tags as a form of information sharing (see Section 5.2.4 above), and as a form of *selective* information sharing, are similar behaviours. However, tags as information sharing are used to draw attention to the individual that is tagged when there is still a desire for a wide audience to see the information whilst tagging as a form of selective sharing is done to specifically draw the attention of the individual tagged without consideration to a wider audience.

5.3 Online information censorship

In addition to decisions regarding sharing online information, participants make decisions to *censor* the information that they share. All 45 participants in this study engage in online censorship practices with the majority (34) *intentionally* censoring information as part of their overall efforts to build and manage their personal reputations.

Information censorship practices take various forms. The four areas of information practices related to censorship that considered in this section. These are:

(1) Platform-based information censorship practices;
(2) The censorship of online information shared as content;
(3) The censorship of interactions with online content information; and
(4) The censorship of information after content has been shared.

5.3.1 Platform-based information censorship practices

The platform-based censorship of information is a common technique that is mainly undertaken to protect professional reputations, rather than private reputation. For some participants, a set of straightforward personal "rules" mean that platform-based censorship is relatively simple. For example, Donna only shares professional information on professional platforms (Donna, diary: 37-40, 45-8) whilst Laura avoids anything "inflammatory" on LinkedIn (Laura: 8-9). Michelle and Fraser use similar tactics as they believe that some information should remain private, and so is inappropriate for professional platforms (Michelle: 19-20, diary: 295-297; Fraser: 48-58).

When there is a mix of professional and private connections on a single platform (as is the case with Facebook for 32 participants in this study) a greater level of content censorship occurs. This is also true when both private and professional contacts are able to access shared information because of mutual connections or through the open privacy settings that are common on Twitter. For example, Kerry views her professional and private interests as strongly linked together. This means she is more discriminating when posting online, especially on platforms that her employer can access (Kerry: 259-264). On the other hand, Andrew, whose privacy settings prevent connections from his professional life seeing his private information online, is also cautious when posting content. Despite this, he is aware that privacy settings might fail to protect his privacy, so he does not post anything on his private platforms that he would not want his employer to see (Andrew: 67-79).

The participants discussed a greater concern for the risk of private information leaking into professional space than they did about professional information entering a private space. For example, Fraser (who does not connect with colleagues on Facebook) explained that it is more important for him to keep his private information out of his professional life than professional information out of his private life (Fraser: 48-58, 69-71). Six participants also hesitate to post professional content on private platforms. For example, Joanne avoids sharing professional information on her private accounts because she believes that her family and friends would not be interested in her professional life, and Yvonne believes that her Facebook account is not an appropriate platform for building her professional reputation (Joanne: 132-136; Yvonne: 399-408).

Less often, platform-based censorship is used to protect *private* reputations, as reported by five participants (Colin, Hannah, Jacqueline, Laura, and Michelle). Here, the participants withhold sharing certain types of information on their private Facebook accounts, even though the same information might be shared on a different platform. Hannah explained that her hesitation to share political information on Facebook is because her “pals are there for the same reason [as she is], which [for] personal catch-ups”. By not posting political content, Hannah’s connections do not have to hear her “banging on about social justice all the time” (Hannah: 39-41). Jacqueline and Laura avoid sharing their political views and social commentary on Facebook for similar reasons. For Michelle and Colin, platform-based censorship is a way to avoid offending family members with their contrasting religious views. In both cases, they will avoid posting content on Facebook, despite sharing those same views on Twitter (Michelle: 14-20, 144-152; Colin: 18-20).

5.3.2 The censorship of online information shared as content

There are two general ways in which participants use censorship to manage information shared as content. The first of these is to refrain from sharing content they generate themselves. The second form of censorship is to refrain from re-posting content that has been created by others.

5.3.2.1 The censorship of user-generated content

The most apparent form of censorship is to refrain from sharing certain types of information online, especially when the information conveys controversial views or is contrary to a participant's view of social etiquette. The majority of the participants (40 of 45) study spoke about this primary form of censorship in their interviews. The participants spoke about their reputations in a general sense that encompassed their "whole self" reputation, as well as censoring the information they share specifically as a way of managing their *professional* reputations.

In the first instance, participants spoke about censoring information in three broad categories: (1) overly personal or intimate information; (2) information that is too controversial; and (3) unimportant or uninteresting information (see Table 10). This aligns to some extent with the categorisation of information that can lead to a negative reputational evaluation, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Category of information that is censored	**Number**	**Names**
Overly personal or intimate	16	Alison, David, Hannah, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Joanne, Kelly, Kerry, Liam, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Sharon, Wendy, and Yvonne
Too controversial	15	Amanda, Andrew, David, Diane, Emma, Gillian, Heather, Helen, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Kevin, Laura, Linda, Rachel, and Zoe
Unimportant or uninteresting	6	Adrian, Fiona, Fraser, Lynn, Nicola, and Sharon

Table 10: Censorship practices by category of information

Information that is considered overly personal or intimate in nature was the most commonly censored category of information, as discussed by 16 participants. This type of content was generally described as information that is directly related to private details about personal issues, family members, or romantic partnerships. For example, Nicola talked specifically about not "over-sharing personal information" which includes not sharing information related to "arguments … or romantic [gestures]" between her and her husband (Nicola: 25-28). The same sentiments were discussed by David who also avoids sharing "overly personal" information. He clarified that that includes all information related to "[personal] relationships" (David: 113-114). On the other hand, Hannah and Rachel talked about a willingness to share some personal information, such as having a baby (Hannah: 107-111) but both are wary of sharing "negative" personal information online, such as a parent's cancer diagnosis (Rachel: 79-83).

Fifteen participants discussed censoring controversial content, including three who also censored personal content. The controversial topics discussed by these participants included religion, politics, and social issues, including those related to sexuality or LGBTQ+ issues. Participants largely spoke about these topics in tandem. For example, Amanda said that she does not "share much about religious views or political views". She stated that "those sorts of issues are much more complex … so I tend to keep those things quite private" (Amanda: 48-53). Gillian said that she will not post anything that "could potentially be seen as me making a political statement, or expressing a political bias, or something around [sex] or sexuality" (Gillian: 64-71).

In addition to censoring content that is of a personal or controversial nature, six participants in this study censor content that they feel is unnecessary or uninteresting. This was generally due to participants' feelings that their own connections would not be interested in the information, as opposed to it not being interesting to themselves. For example, Fiona said "I tend not to share [what] I would consider banal posts … I don't find it interesting reading other people's so I can't imagine any of them would find mine very interesting" (Fiona: 36-39). Nicola stated that her reluctance for posting "trivial" content was that she did not think "everyone needs to know what I'm eating for every meal [or] every thought that goes through [my] head" (Nicola: 73-75). For Fraser, the reluctance to share this type of information was because of his own disinterest when others share similar content. He said:

> I try to avoid things that I find clichéd [such as] cat videos. I try to avoid animals. … I try not to post anything I consider saccharin whether it's anything heartfelt about a family [or] anything sort of heartfelt … I try to avoid [that kind of content] because it feels really trite to me (Fraser: 115-123).

In addition to discussion about the *categories* of information that they censor, 29 participants discussed two primary *reasons* for the censorship of user-generated content. These were (1) to avoid causing conflict, offence, or misunderstandings and (2) to manage the blurring between their private and professional lives (see Table 11).

Reason for censoring information	**Number**	**Names**
To avoid conflict, offence, or misunderstandings	18	Andrew, Callum, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Gillian, Heather, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Kerry, Laura, Linda, Rachel, Rosemary, Scott, Susan, and Zoe
To manage blurring between private and professional lives	16	Adrian, Alison, Andrew, Emma, Hannah, Hazel, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Laura, Nicola, Rachel, Sharon, and Wendy

Table 11: Reason for censorship

The censorship of contentious content is generally done as to not "deliberately offend" or "hurt" other people (Callum: 68-70; Donna: 61-63). This is true even when participants do not feel that the content is offensive, but also when they fear a post might be "misinterpreted" or "taken the wrong way" (Andrew: 137-140; Gillian: 104-107). When participants spoke about censoring content that might offend others, they discussed both a hesitation to offend others as well as how that offence would affect their own reputations. For example, Kevin said "I wouldn't post things because I wouldn't want [my connections] to think that I'm an offensive person" (Kevin: 208-209). Laura talked about safeguarding her reputation by not posting content that might be contrary to her connections' views "because they might think [she is] judging" them for holding different views from her own (Laura: 107-110).

As discussed on in Section 5.3.1, it is common for the participants in this study to censor the content they post on different platforms as a way to manage the blurring between their private and professional lives. However, 15 participants completely censor some content, regardless of the platform, as a way of managing that same blurring. This was generally discussed in terms of larger privacy issues related to the Internet, access to online information beyond the intended audience, and "the public domain" (Alison: 43-45). Sharon described this as view that sharing too much information online is like "putting yourself into the Big Brother house" and states she is trying "create a balance" by censoring content (Sharon: 177-179). Similarly, Andrew said "I think [it is] important to be aware [that] what you share is available and accessible to anyone" (Andrew: 126-127).

5.3.2.2 The censorship of "re-posted" content created by others

Whilst over half of the participants (28 of 45) in this study spoke about sharing information by re-posting content, only seven participants talked specifically about the censorship of re-posted content (Andrew, Liam, Roger, Rosemary, Sharon, Wendy, and Zoe). In all of these cases, the participants discussed a reluctance to be associated with the content. This is despite an understanding by participants that "re-tweets are not an endorsement". For Wendy, this means that she will forgo re-posting content if she is unable to "evaluate it highly". This is to avoid being seen as endorsing something that she does not support (Wendy: 460-470).

In addition to the concern of being associated with content, Andrew shared his secondary reason for not re-posting content when he said:

> I'm quite conscious that if I'm constantly [re-posting], sometimes it does look like I'm not having a say, I'm just sort of going at the back of other peoples' comments. I try and acknowledge how often I [re-post] and try and thread that in with some original [content] and some links to some different articles so it just doesn't look like I'm just being a sheep [and] just following other people and sharing what they write (Andrew: 188-193).

5.3.3 The censorship of interactions with online content

As discussed in Section 5.2.3, there are two primary forms of interacting with content considered in this study: comments and likes. Whilst participants spoke about the two forms of interactions as separate *information sharing practices*, they spoke about interactions with more fluidity regarding *information censorship*. Because of this, censorship practices related to interactions are considered together in this section.

Interacting with content is not generally an *intentional* reputation-building practice for the majority of the participants in this study. However, the *censorship* of interactions is largely undertaken specifically to build or manage personal reputations, as discussed by 36 participants. Here, participants will censor the ways in which they interact with online content, if they interact at all.

The three primary reasons that participants in this study refrain from interacting with content as a form of censorship are: (1) to avoid political conversations or content that is contrary to their own beliefs or values (29 participants); (2) because of a sense that the information should not have been shared in the first instance (13 participants); and (3) as a way of managing the blurring between their private and professional lives (9 participants).

The most common reason for refraining from interacting with content is to avoid conversations with others on contentious topics, as discussed by 29 participants. This is largely because participants do not want to "have a debate" or "fight with strangers" (Hannah: 422-424; Yvonne, diary: 30-32). Laura explained this a reluctance to "[expose] yourself to a lot of criticism … [from] people who like to fight on social media" (Laura: 21-23). However, only four of these participants spoke specifically about censoring interactions on this type of information as an intentional way of managing their reputations. For example, Amanda wrote in her diary that she "wouldn't comment on anything political … as to not influence anyone's opinion of [her]" (Amanda, diary: 61-63). Hannah's concern about interacting with "in-depth online discussions" is related to her long-term reputation. She noted in her diary that "everything you put [online] is permanent, so if you say something unthinkingly stupid or ignorant or just utterly wrong then it's there forever" (Hannah, diary: 115-120).

Interactions are also censored if it is felt that the information should not have been shared, as is the case for 13 participants. Here, participants will withhold interactions because the content is "too provocative" (Alan: 218-219) or it contains "really personal information" (Karen: 34-36). In general, this group of participants noted a sense that interacting with such content was a form of encouragement. Because of this, they felt it was best to avoid interactions with the content. For example, Callum said:

> I won't comment because it's not something that I think people should be putting [online]. So I feel like if I comment on that it's kind of encouraging them to put more on and that's the sort of thing that I don't think people should be putting on social media at all (Callum: 106-109).

For those participants who censor their interactions as a way of managing the blurring between their private and professional lives, the practice is seen as an intentional way to manage reputation. For example, Amanda explained in her diary that she abstains from liking photos posted by a particular friend on Facebook because Amanda knows some of their mutual connections through work. Amanda does not want to "bring those circles into a link" because it would be "weird" and it might create an uncertain reputational impact through the intersection of the two "circles" on social media (Amanda, diary: 5-9). Similarly, Jacqueline wrote in her diary of a "hard choice" about whether or not to respond to her manager's posts on Facebook. She noted that she had to take into consideration her manager's "position in the community … in [the] organisation … [their] friendship … and [Jacqueline's] own position in relation to all of the above" (Jacqueline, diary: 62-67).

Whilst Amanda and Jacqueline noted instances of censorship based on their known connections, Laura discussed censoring her interactions because of a lack of certainty over the extent of her network, including secondary connections who may have access to the information. Because of these unknowns, Laura censors her comments to avoid exposing herself to "a lot of criticism" and "repercussions" (Laura: 14-18).

5.3.4 The censorship of information after content has been shared

Deleting or editing content after it has been posted is considered here as a form of censorship. This was discussed by the majority of participants (39), 36 of whom spoke about deleting content, and eight about editing content after it has been posted, including five participants who do both.

The four reasons given by participants for deleting information were (1) subsequent reflections on the appropriateness or suitability of the content (16 participants); (2) a simple decision that they no longer wanted the content to be available (15 participants);

(3) the content had caused disputes or misunderstandings (13 participants); and (4) because the content contained errors (7 participants).

Sixteen participants discussed deleting content after it was determined that it should not be online. This was generally done as a form of reputation management based on a later review of the content or the suggestion of others. For example, Adrian discussed reviewing content he posted on Twitter and later realised that “if certain people saw them, my reputation would be in tatters” (Adrian: 119-120). Helen talked about having to delete content she posted on Facebook after professional colleagues admonished her for it. This also altered her decisions about the types of information she would share – if any – related to her professional life in the future (Helen: 388-393).

Deleting content because it caused disputes or misunderstandings was discussed by 13 participants. This is especially true when the comments on a post are argumentative or inappropriate. For example, Lynn deleted a post after a family member wrote a comment that “caused a bit of ugliness” because she did not want that “going on” on her social media account (Lynn: 113-119). Similarly, Michelle talked about deleting a tweet when it “got an adverse reaction” which made her think “I shouldn’t have posted that” (Michelle: 51-54).

The last of the four reasons considered in this section is the deletion of content because it contained a spelling or grammatical error, as discussed by seven participants. This was viewed as an intentional reputational management practice by all seven participants as they did not want to appear to be “stupid” or that they “couldn’t spell” (Fraser: 155-159; Kelly: 81-83). However, the content is normally re-posted after it has been amended (Nicola: 113-116; Wendy: 269-275).

In addition to those participants who delete content because of spelling or grammatical errors, eight participants also discussed editing content after it had been posted to amend an error. For Donna, this is done for any “really obvious” mistakes (Donna: 66-67). On the other hand, Liam tends to “pedantically” edit his posts and might edit something “a few times” to eliminate anything that “looks really stupid” (Liam: 123-126).

Seven of these 36 participants who spoke about deleting content also spoke about changes to their information practices as a result of having deleted content in the past. For example, Helen and Rosemary deleted content on Twitter in the past that they later felt should not have been posted. Because of these experiences, Rosemary said she became “more cautious than I probably should be” when deciding if she will share information online (Helen: 388-393; Rosemary: 120-124). Craig discussed how he came to realise that by deleting content, it appeared that he was “trying to destroy the evidence of something”. After that realisation, Craig decided not to delete content but rather he would “deal with [any comments] and potentially amend the post” later if necessary (Craig: 132-137).

5.4 The creation and maintenance of online connections

Online connections act as a form of information by showing relationships or links between individuals. Primary or first-level connections are *individuals* found on lists of “friends”, “followers”, or “connections”, depending on the platform. These connections are created intentionally by sending or accepting a request to connect or unintentionally where the platform allows people to follow others freely (such as Twitter). There are also secondary connections that can exist between two individuals. These connections are formed through mutual connections within an individual’s extended network. These connections are commonly known as “friends-of-friends”. In addition to primary and secondary connections with individuals, connections can also include links with social networking profiles such as those for brands and businesses, hobbies and interests, or political and social ideals.

The four areas of information practices related to connecting with others online that are considered in this section. These are:

(1) Platform-based practices related to online connections;
(2) The creation and management of online connections;
(3) The avoidance of creating online connections; and
(4) Terminating or “hiding” online connections.

5.4.1 Platform-based practices related to online connections

Decisions to connect with others are often made based on the social media platform. It is common for participants to use different criteria for *private* platforms and *professional* platforms. For example, LinkedIn is predominately reserved for connecting with professional contacts, Facebook is largely used for private connections, and Twitter is a mix of both private and professional connections. This is in line with platform-based information sharing practices, as discussed in Section 5.2.1.

Participants who use LinkedIn (36) spoke about connecting with others on the platform as part of their professional lives. In general, these participants connect with others on LinkedIn for seeking and sharing professional information. For example, Andrew said that he uses the platform "quite infrequently" and connects with others "to follow people, to like things that are active in [my professional] community" (Andrew: 42-44).

LinkedIn is also viewed as a way to steer professional contacts away from a more private Facebook account. For example, Gillian discussed how she will re-direct professional contacts that she "vaguely" knows to LinkedIn if they send her a request to connect on Facebook because she would prefer to connect on LinkedIn" (Gillian: 508-510).

Participants who use Facebook (43) discussed their primary use of the platform as a private space where they connect with family and friends. The platform is viewed as a way to stay connected with people that participants know "in real life". However, the majority of Facebook users (32) make exceptions that allow for some professional connections on the platform. For example, Amanda talked about connecting with some professional colleagues on Facebook in a "deliberate" way. She explained:

> They're generally the sort of people that I would [sit] down and have a cup of coffee with and a chat, as opposed to the sort of colleagues [once] you've said, "Hello, how are you today?" [there is] nothing else to say. … They're the sort of [colleagues] that I would stop and have a chat with, as opposed to have very little in common in terms of friendship in the workplace (Amanda: 314-320).

Gillian follows a similar same practice, relegating those work colleagues with whom that she would not normally "hang out" to Twitter and/or LinkedIn whilst connecting with those she perceives as "friends" on Facebook (Gillian: 507-510). Kevin discussed an additional criterion for adding colleagues to Facebook. He stated that he does not believe it appropriate that he connect with anyone "who [he is] in a position of authority over, or if they're in a position of authority over [him]". This means that Kevin will only use Facebook to connect with colleagues who are "friends in real life" *and* are at the same level as he in the workplace (Kevin: 340-354).

Unlike LinkedIn and Facebook, the Twitter users in this study (41) acknowledged that they have no control over who connects with them on the platform unless a Twitter account is set to private or they actively block individuals from accessing their content. For those who have private Twitter accounts, the approval process for professional contacts or colleagues depends on perceived levels of friendship. For example, Joanne has both a public and private Twitter account. Because she is "a lot freer" when sharing information on the latter, Joanne is cautious about accepting new followers (Joanne: 7-9). When discussing decisions on Twitter accounts to follow, the participants spoke about following people "who are interested in the same sorts of things" (Alison: 176-177) as well as "general" or "political" accounts (Stephen: 271-274).

5.4.2 Reasons for creating and maintaining online connections

All participants in this study discussed connecting with others because they found the content they shared to be "interesting" or felt that the person sharing the information was "knowledgeable". For example, when talking about his connections on Twitter, Roger said: "I've chosen to follow them because I think that they contribute interesting and appropriate [content]" (Roger: 90-92). Craig explained in his diary his "criteria" connections as:

> Someone who posts high-quality but not high-quantity content, who engages in conversation, is in a job sector or has interests that are similar to mine, is not precious about the principle and practice of sharing knowledge … in other words, someone who I'd have a good conversation or debate with … from whom I learn or gain something by being connected … someone who adds value to my network (Craig, diary: 142-147).

In addition to connecting with others because they are interesting or knowledgeable, two-thirds (28) of the participants also spoke about connecting with others (1) to create an alignment between themselves and the connection; (2) in order to keep in touch with others; and (3) out of social obligation or to be "polite", as shown in Table 12 below.

Reason for connecting	Number	Names
Interesting content and/or knowledgeable person	45	All Adrian, Alan, Alison, Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Craig, David, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Hazel, Heather, Helen, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Kevin, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Roger, Rosemary, Scott, Sharon, Stephen, Susan, Wendy, Yvonne, and Zoe
To create an alignment	20	Amanda, Andrew, Craig, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Gillian, Heather, Joanne, Karen, Kevin, Laura, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Rebecca, Sharon, Wendy, and Yvonne
To keep in touch with others	12	Andrew, Callum, Craig, Gillian, Hannah, Heather, Joanne, Karen, Kevin, Rebecca, Roger, and Sharon
Out of social obligation or politeness	11	Alison, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Heather, Jennifer, Joanne, Liam, Linda, Rosemary, and Sharon

Table 12: Reasons for creating and maintaining online connections

Twenty participants spoke about creating alignments with others in terms of their professional reputations. This group of participants view these alignments as beneficial to professional advancement, reputational gain, and job seeking. For example, Kevin characterised LinkedIn as an "on-going, live CV", and viewed his connections on the platform as possible future employers (Kevin: 20-21). Others use LinkedIn for as a knowledge-building tool in addition to its potential for career advancement. For example, Craig said that when considering if he should connect with someone on the site, he asks himself questions about the individual's ability to help him in his career:

> Is this person going to open up connections that might benefit me either in terms of boosting my knowledge in my field or related fields? … Is this somebody who I'm going to come across in the future who may be in a senior position in my field? [Is this somebody] who might put somebody else in touch with me or me in touch with somebody else who might have some kind of benefit to me and I would hope to them in the future? (Craig: 225-231).

This same group of 20 participants spoke about connecting to others on LinkedIn as an important way of maintaining relationships. For example, Yvonne explained:

> If I meet them at a conference, I [will] decide [to connect] … if they do something interesting [that is] relevant to me … if they have an expertise that's complementary to mine … [if] we might [collaborate] together … [then] I like to connect with them, because it's a lot easier to keep in touch (Yvonne: 270-283).

Seven of those 20 participants (Craig, Diane, Joanne, Laura, Natalie, Rebecca, and Wendy) also use Twitter as a way of creating alignments through connections. For example, Joanne connects with people who "are leaders in their fields" with the hope that she "might actually have a conversation with them". She does this because she feels it is "good for [her] reputation [to have] a conversation with someone who's a leader in their field" (Joanne: 416-419). Similarly, Wendy connects with people who she believes can help her in her career, even though she is "not proud" of making connections for such strategic purposes (Wendy: 394-400).

Connecting with others on Facebook as a way of "keeping in touch" was discussed by 12 participants. Here, the primary motivation was to maintain a connection with family and friends in an effort to keep communications open related to life events and similar updates. However, for five participants (Craig, Gillian, Heather, Karen, and Sharon), connections are also viewed as a way of keeping in touch with former colleagues. For example, Gillian connected with a colleague on Facebook prior to leaving her position with the organisation because she wanted to maintain “a longer term relationship” (Gillian, diary: 70-72). Whilst these connections with former colleagues are generally based on perceived levels of friendship, Sharon shared that she feels it is “worth keeping in touch” with some former colleagues because they might lead to future jobs. For Sharon, these connections are ideally made through LinkedIn, but she understands that not everyone uses that platform (Sharon: 91-95).

Not all connections are made willingly, as indicated by 11 participants who discussed forming online connections out of obligation or to be “polite”. Obligatory connections with family or friends from school was noted by all of these participants, generally as a way of sparing awkward conversations in an offline environment. For example, Gillian wrote in her diary that she accepted a request to connect with someone from her running group because it would be “socially awkward and rude” not to (Gillian, diary: 29-32). Joanne discussed the need to connect with a family member, despite not wanting to, because she worried she would “look like a not very nice person” if she did not accept the request (Joanne: 463-465).

Of these 11 participants, seven of them (Alison, Fraser, Gillian, Jennifer, Liam, Linda, and Sharon) also discussed connecting with work colleagues out of obligation. For example, Linda reported having connected in the past with work colleagues out of obligation, then terminating connections with all those with whom she did not have similar interests or a personal connection as soon as she changed jobs (Linda: 254-265). Alison reported a similar practice in that she connects with work colleagues on Facebook because it is the convention at her workplace. However, she removes the connection with anyone who leaves the organisation (Alison: 211-213).

5.4.3 Reasons for not connecting with others online

Whilst all 45 participants discussed their reasons for connecting with others online, only 34 reflected on their reasons for *not* connecting with others online (see Table 13 below). The primary reason given for not connecting was managing the boundaries between their private and professional lives (20 participants).

Reason for not connecting	Number	Names
Managing boundaries between private and professional lives	20	Alan, Alison, Andrew, Colin, Emma, Fraser, Heather, Jacqueline, James, Joanne, Kelly, Kerry, Kevin, Laura, Nicola, Rosemary, Scott, Stephen, Susan, and Yvonne
Individual making the request is unknown, or not well-known	15	Adrian, Amanda, Callum, Colin, Craig, Donna, Hannah, Helen, Jacqueline, Joanne, Kelly, Linda, Lynn, Stephen, and Zoe
Generally uninterested in connecting with the individual	8	Amanda, David, Emma, Hannah, Jennifer, Nicola, Roger, and Rosemary
Individual holds contrary views	2	Diane and Susan

Table 13: Reasons for not connecting with others online

As previously mentioned, the majority of participants in this study will connect with at least some professional contacts or colleagues on their private platforms, given the right circumstances (see Section 5.4.2). However, 20 participants spoke specifically about *not* connecting with some individuals as a way of managing the boundaries between their professional and private lives. For two of these participants (Fraser and Scott) strict rules are undertaken to ensure that there are no professional connections maintained on private platforms. For example, Scott never connects with colleagues on Facebook as he feels it inappropriate for him to know “the ins and outs” of their lives, given his managerial position. He believes that allowing professional contacts to see the “ridiculous things” that he posts online would damage the level of professionalism that he wishes to portray (Scott: 168-170, 383-385).

Eighteen of those 20 participants consider a wider range of factors from the appropriateness of the platform (see Section 5.4.1) to the appropriateness of the connection. For example, Jacqueline will not connect with any of the clients from her place of employment (Jacqueline: 439-442). Similarly, Laura will not connect with current students from her place of work (Laura: 653-658).

There were three other reasons stated for not connecting with individuals online: (1) the individual making the request was unknown, or not well-known, (2) a general lack of interest, and (3) because the individual help contrary views to the participant. However, these reasons were casually mentioned and not expanded upon.

5.4.4 Reasons for limiting or terminating online connections

All 45 participants spoke about terminating or "hiding"[20] online connections after the connection has been made, including those who discussed a reluctance to terminate connections (see Table 14 below). This includes five participants (Alan, Amanda, David, Fiona, and Scott) who will not terminate or hide connections.

Practice related to limiting or terminating online connections	Number	Names
Terminating connections	35	Adrian, Alison, Andrew, Colin, Craig, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fraser, Gillian, Hazel, Heather, Helen, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kevin, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Nicola, Rebecca, Roger, Rosemary, Sharon, Stephen, Susan, Wendy, Yvonne, and Zoe
Hiding connections	26	Adrian, Callum, Colin, Craig, Diane, Donna, Hannah, Heather, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Sharon, Stephen, and Zoe
Will not terminate certain connections	21	Callum, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fraser, Gillian, Helen, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Laura, Liam, Michelle, Nicola, Stephen, Susan, Wendy, and Zoe
Will not terminate any connections	5	Alan, Amanda, David, Fiona, and Scott

Table 14: Practice related to terminating or hiding online connections

[20] Hiding a connection means that an individual's social media content no longer appears on the news feed of the person hiding. However, this does not terminate the connection and the person being hidden is not notified of the action.

The primary reason given to terminate or hide a connection is a lack of interest in either the content the individual shares, or in maintaining a connection with the individual. The primary reason for *not* terminating a connection is because it might create an awkward situation for the participant in the future (see Table 15 below). This includes 25 of the 26 participants who discussed not terminating connections. The remaining participant, Alan, does not terminate connections because he does not feel the need to do so. Eight participants (Diane, Jennifer, Joanne, Laura, Liam, Nicola, Stephen, and Zoe) spoke about both terminating and hiding connections because of a lack of interest as well as a reluctance to terminate other connections.

Reason for limiting or terminating connections	**Number**	**Names**
Terminate connection due to a lack of interest in content or in maintaining connection	29	Alison, Andrew, Colin, Craig, Diane, Emma, Fraser, Gillian, Hazel, Heather, Helen, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kevin, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Nicola, Rebecca, Rosemary, Sharon, Stephen, Wendy, Yvonne, and Zoe
Terminate connection due to contrary views	7	Adrian, Donna, James, Kelly, Roger, Susan, and Zoe
Hide connection due to lack of interest in the content they share	21	Adrian, Callum, Colin, Craig, Diane, Donna, Hannah, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Sharon, Stephen, and Zoe
Hide connection because it would be awkward to terminate connection	9	Callum, Diane, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Nicola, Stephen, and Wendy
Will not terminate connection because it might be awkward	25	Amanda, Callum, David, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Fraser, Gillian, Helen, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Laura, Liam, Michelle, Nicola, Scott, Stephen, Susan, Wendy, and Zoe

Table 15: Reason for terminating or hiding connections

The majority of the participants (35) acknowledged that they would terminate online connections. There were two reasons given for this: (1) a general lack of interest in the content or in maintaining a connection with an individual (29 participants) and (2) to terminate connections with individuals who hold contrary views to those of the participants (7 participants).

When participants spoke about terminating connections due to a lack of interest, it was based on their desire to have an interesting news feed, rather than as a way of building or managing their reputation. For example, Kevin explained that he will terminate connections on Twitter when he determines that they are “not actually that interesting” because they are “certainly not worth [connecting to] anymore” (Kevin: 375-377). Laura spoke about reviewing her connections on Facebook and asking herself “am I really friends with you?” before terminating connections with those who were not. She explained that “if [I am] not that close to them, then [I] don’t need to keep [the connection]” (Laura: 309-311).

Seven participants spoke about terminating connections with individuals who hold contrary views. In all of these instances, they noted how those views impacted reputational evaluations, as discussed in Chapter 6. For example, Kelly discussed attributing negative evaluations to connections who posted “any level of prejudice or any racist [content]”, stating that it would prompt her to immediately terminate a connection (Kelly: 224-225).

More than half of the participants in this study (24) talked about hiding connections. The primary reason for this is because of lack of interest in the content connections share (21 participants). In these cases, the decision to hide a connection rather that terminate it was generally discussed as retaining an option to reverse the process later. For example, Hannah explained that:

> I [hide] people who maybe I do want to [be connected] with them but I don’t want to see all their updates or I’m kind of indifferent about [them]. Then I would generally just [hide] them rather than [terminate the connection] (Hannah: 524-527).

As discussed in Section 5.4.2, there are times when participants connect with another individual out of obligation or necessity. These same issues can also mean that participants feel unable to terminate connections with an individual after it has been established. Twenty-five participants spoke specifically about *not* terminating connections after they have been made because they felt it would be awkward or impolite to do so. This includes nine participants who hide connections. Here, the practice of hiding connections is undertaken to avoid upsetting family members and to limit potential embarrassment in case of an encounter with the connection in an offline environment. For example, Kelly talked about a reluctance to terminate connections with family members when she is “not comfortable seeing [the content they post]”. Instead, she hides them so that they remain connected even though she “doesn’t want to see anything they post” (Kelly: 214-217). Karen discussed a preference for hiding connections because she would feel “embarrassed” if she terminated a connection then encountered the individual offline. However, Karen would terminate a connection if she believed that in an offline environment their “eyes wouldn’t even say hello” (Karen: 267-271).

The remaining 16 participants who spoke about not terminating connections did not feel that they needed to take any actions to limit the connection by hiding them. Instead, they just spoke about allowing the connection to be maintained to avoid an awkward situation. For example, Fiona discussed a “falling out” with her neighbours that has created animosity in her offline environment. However, she feels it would be “a bit of a horrible thing” to terminate their online connection over the situation (Fiona: 251-255). Natalie explained that she does not want to “offend anyone” by terminating a connection and stated that “it’s just the content they’re sharing that I might not like” (Natalie: 380-384).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that participants deploy different information sharing practices based on the platform they are using and the perceived audience for that platform. This is generally viewed as a way of managing the blur between participants’ professional and private lives, with an emphasis on managing their professional reputation.

As with practices related to showcasing personas (Chapter 4), the information practices undertaken in the building and management of reputation are undertaken with the deliberate intention of building and managing professional reputations. The management of private reputations tends to be of less importance to the participants in this study.

The ways in which participants use online information to build and manage their own reputations also impacts their evaluations of others, with participants using their own practices as guides. The evaluation of reputations on the basis of online information is the focus of Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: The evaluation of reputation on the basis of online information

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis and interpretation of data for the third of four research questions (RQ3), "How do individuals evaluate the reputations of others based on the information available to them online?" It is organised in three sections, each related to a different aspect of the evaluation of reputation of others on the basis of online information shared on social media. These are:

(1) **A general overview of reputational evaluation** (Section 6.2, including the categories of information that contribute to positive, negative, or neutral evaluations;
(2) **Information sharing practices that influence reputational evaluations** (Section 6.3), including those that impact or alter a previous evaluation; and
(3) **The re-evaluation of reputations** (Section 6.4), including the potential for one individual to be evaluated with multiple reputations.

6.2 General overview of reputational evaluations on categories of information shared online

The participants in this study found it generally difficult to convey how they use online information to evaluate the reputations of others. However, there are some clear information sharing practices that are more likely to impact positive and negative reputational evaluations. The participants in this study generally spoke about reputational evaluations in general terms or as "whole person" reputations, rather than evaluations specific to an individual's private or professional reputations.

6.2.1 Categories of information that contributes to positive reputational evaluations

When asked about the categories of information that might contribute to a positive reputation, three primary categories were mentioned by participants: (1) content that is funny, entertaining, or interesting, which includes content that makes participants laugh or is thought-provoking; (2) content that is encouraging, motivational, or inspirational, which includes information that is viewed as being "valuable" or "important" on a personal level; and (3) content that provides insights into an individual's life, especially when it makes them feel closer to their connections' lives. Thirty-one participants specifically addressed these categories of information as positive reputational markers in their diaries or interviews (see Table 16 below).

Category of information	Number	Names
Funny, entertaining, or interesting	27	Alison, Amanda, Callum, David, Diane, Donna, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Heather, Helen, James, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kevin, Laura, Michelle, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Rosemary, Scott, Stephen, Susan, Wendy, and Zoe
Encouraging, motivational, or inspirational	18	Donna, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Heather, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kevin, Laura, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rebecca, Scott, Stephen, Susan, and Zoe
Insights into an individual's life	11	Amanda, Fraser, Hannah, Helen, Jennifer, Laura, Lynn, Michelle, Rebecca, Scott, and Sharon

Table 16: Categories of information that contributes to positive reputational evaluations

Content that is *funny, entertaining, or interesting* was discussed as a contributing factor for positive evaluations by 27 (of the 31) participants. Most participants were unable to expand on their reasons for providing positive evaluations based on funny information. However, seven of these participants (Amanda, Alison, Callum, Fraser, Michelle, Susan, and Wendy) said that information that makes them laugh or that shows that their connection has a good sense of humour is considered a positive marker for an individual's reputation. Two of these seven also spoke about making positive evaluations when they share the same sense of humour (Michelle, diary: 203-204; Alison: 273-274).

Information that was described as entertaining or interesting was easier for the participants to clarify. For example, Scott said that content depicting drawings and other visual art were both entertaining and interesting. He evaluates connections positively when they share this type of content on Facebook because he actively enjoys seeing their work on his social media feeds. This is because connections with the ability and willingness to share their art not only provide Scott with enjoyment, but it also gives him the impression that those connections are good artists, which he views as a positive trait (Scott: 236-244). James also described art-related content as being both entertaining and interesting, even when the art is not created by his connections. He wrote in his diary about making positive reputational evaluations when his connections share “random paintings”. Part of that positive evaluation is because by sharing the paintings, James’ connection is showing that they are “classy without being pretentious about it” (James, diary: 15-16).

Five participants spoke about interesting content as that which shared news or information in a knowledgeable way. For example, Alison spoke about connections who acted as “citizen journalists” at a series of social and political protests. She evaluated their reputations positively in part because they were “on the ground” and they were “more honest and interesting [than] the newscasters from big broadcasting corporations” (Alison: 234-240) whilst the production of interesting content helps Stephen to develop a level of “trust” for his connections, especially when the content they share is “thought provoking” (Stephen: 300-304, 357-361). From a professional perspective, Joanne spoke about her connections’ *professional* reputations in relationship to their sharing interesting content on work-related Twitter accounts and blogs. She felt that sharing information on multiple platforms gave her a “rounded view” of her professional connections as it shows that they are “very knowledgeable in their field” (Joanne: 174-181).

Eighteen participants (of the 31) reported feeling positively towards individuals who share information that is interpreted as *encouraging, motivational, or inspirational*. One of the reasons for these positive evaluations is that the participants like to see their connections sharing information in a positive manner. This is especially true when they are sharing positive content when experiencing personal challenges. For example, Helen attributes positive reputations to her connections who share “uplifting” content despite their own on-going health problems (Helen, diary: 54-55). Similarly, Rebecca spoke about evaluating a connection positively for sharing optimistic and “brave” content about her adopted children who can be “challenging”. Rebecca said that she felt an additional “element of … wow” when her connection remained positive despite her situation (Rebecca: 254-260).

Participants also spoke about how this type of information made them feel positively about themselves or their abilities, and that it can encourage them to do something positive. For example, Joanne found motivation from an online connection whom she has never met in person. When her connection shared information about a personal achievement, Joanne thought to herself "if she can do that, I can too". That same connection later took time to share motivational information in an online chat. Joanne felt that her connection "gave herself a really good reputation" because of that (Joanne: 317-324).

The final information category is information that provides an insight into an individual's everyday life. This was discussed as being a positive reputational marker for 11 participants (of the 31). When others share information about their everyday activities, these participants noted that the information provided them with new and interesting information about their connections. For example, Amanda wrote about her admiration for a Facebook connection when she shared photos of a cake she had made. Amanda noted that without that picture, she "wouldn't have known she could make such things". This made her think of her connection as "really talented" (Amanda, diary: 80-82). For Laura, these everyday insights come from seeing a "different angle" from which to view the ways others experience the world, especially in the case of a newly-single "mummy friend" who shares information about the stresses of being a single mother (Laura, diary: 85-90).

Three participants spoke about the ways in which information that provides insights into someone's life can help to sway reputations from relatively neutral to positive. Hannah described this transition in her evaluation when discussing a connection who generally shares content online "without really thinking about it" giving her the impression that his is "maybe a bit vapid". However, when that same connection shared a comment that was "really insightful" she was left with the opinion that he had "thought a lot about it and knew what he was talking about". The new insights into her connection made her realise that she had "sold the guy short" (Hannah: 573-584).

In general, this group of 11 participants discussed "everyday life" information as that which relates to family life, including photographs of children and grandchildren. This type of information was considered to be a strong positive reputational marker from this group of participants. The wider group view can be illustrated by Scott's comments when he said "It's generally posts about family and friends … and it makes you sit there and think. … That's really nice" (Scott: 264-265).

6.2.2 Categories of information that contributes to negative reputational evaluations

Like the positive information categories discussed above, participants spoke about three primary categories of information that might contribute to a negative reputational evaluation: (1) content that is excessively personal or intimate in nature, including information about personal relationships or children; (2) content that is viewed as bragging or "showing off", including sharing information as a "humblebrag"[21]; and (3) content that appears to be "courting attention", including information that seems intentionally vague, prompting others to interact with the content in order to receive more information (see Table 17 below).

Category of information	Number	Names
Content that is excessively personal or intimate in nature	32	Adrian, Alan, Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Craig, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Fraser, Hannah, Hazel, Helen, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Nicola, Rachel, Roger, Scott, Sharon, Susan, and Wendy
Content that is viewed as bragging or "showing off"	24	Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Craig, Donna, Fraser, Hannah, Hazel, Helen, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Kevin, Liam, Lynn, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Rosemary, Scott, Susan, and Wendy
Content that appears to be "courting attention"	21	Alison, Amanda, Callum, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Helen, Jennifer, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Kevin, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Scott, Susan, and Wendy

Table 17: Categories of information that contribute to negative reputational evaluations

[21] A humblebrag is information that appears to be modest or self-depreciating but is designed to be self-congratulatory or boastful.

Sharing content that contains too much personal or intimate information is a negative reputational marker for the majority of participants (32). Understandings of what constitutes “personal” or “intimate” information varied between participants ranging from information about an individual’s children and relationship tensions to intimate details about medical or sexual health. For example, Callum stated that sharing information about family members who are suffering from an illness is too personal. He does not “understand why people feel the need” to share that kind of information. Despite acknowledging that he feels “sympathetic for the person and for what they’re going through” he views his connections “quite negatively” because it is the “type of thing that you should keep to yourself” (Callum: 204-211, diary: 3-6). Likewise, sharing details about a connection’s own mental or personal health issues can elicit similar negative reputational evaluations (Karen: 34-40; Joanne, diary: 10-11).

Sharing too many personal details about children can also provoke a negative reputational evaluation. Donna explained that this kind of information sharing makes her question the judgement of her connections, despite enjoying the updates about the children (Donna, diary: 60-66). Sharing personal details about children can also lead to questions about privacy and consent, adding to the negative evaluation. For example, Joanne talked about a connection who “doesn’t quite know where to draw the line on privacy” (Joanne: 443-447).

Information related to intimate details about significant others is also cause for a negative reputational evaluation, in part because it makes participants “uncomfortable”. For example, Kelly evaluated one of her connection’s reputation negatively for sharing the details of a fight they had with their partner online. She does not think “that’s for such a wide audience” (Kelly: 237-242). Sharon also talked about feeling uncomfortable after learning of one of her connection’s impending divorce via Facebook. Despite feeling sympathetic for the woman’s situation, Sharon did not feel that it was appropriate to share those details online (Sharon: 405-412).

Twenty-four participants reported that “bragging” or “showing off” in content shared online can contribute to a negative reputation. This was most often discussed in relation to information shared about holidays, work-related travel, or personal accomplishments. Bragging about holidays and work-related travel was often discussed as irritating or frustrating. Joanne shared in her diary that when colleagues boasted about travelling for work she felt jealous and "left behind" (Joanne, diary: 42-44). Fraser also gave negative evaluations to connections bragging about holidays. This was especially true when a connection was "humblebragging", which is something that Fraser "hates" as he views it as a form of attention-seeking (Fraser: 177-179, 194-195).

Jealousy is also the emotion attributed to content that brags about athletic accomplishments or craft-based achievements that leave participants feeling like failures. For example, Helen shared that one of her connections "always posts" about time spent at the gym, running, or cycling. She explained that, in addition to feeling jealous, her connection's bragging makes her feel like "a failure" as she can no longer do those things (Helen, diary: 40-41). Likewise, Amanda feels negatively towards some of her connections who appear to brag about their craft activities – despite feeling positively about a connection who shared a photo of a cake on Facebook, as noted above. In this case, Amanda stated that:

> It almost takes you back [to] childhood days, where you'd be doing a craft activity in the classroom, and there would always be somebody who would be saying to the teacher, 'Look at what I've done. Look at mine! Look at mine! Look at mine!' And everyone else around them is pretty much thinking, 'I could do that, too. But I'm not the one standing up and waving it.' So, there is certainly an element of that (Amanda: 354-360).

Attention-seeking content, or content that appears to "court attention" was discussed as a negative reputational marker by 21 participants. Whilst this type of content can sometimes be synonymous to "bragging" content (Hannah: 211-214), it is generally interpreted as a way of soliciting sympathy (Callum, diary: 4-6; Karen: 35-39) or as a way of garnering further interaction. For example, Liam wrote in his diary about a connection who shared a status that was "meant to provoke a debate but [that was] framed as a statement". He could not understand why his connection did not just ask a direct question. Liam felt that this kind of information sharing practice "feels cloying and needy", even if that was not the connection's intent (Liam: 52-56).

This kind of information was discussed with even greater negative views when it was shared vaguely. For example, Nicola shared in her diary that two connections shared "vague statuses" in one day (they read: "I sooo hate some folk!!!!" and "If you don't like what I have to say, don't bloody ask!!"). She found these to be "annoying" as neither connection would elaborate when questioned, prompting her to feel they were "attention seeking … and quite sad" (Nicola, diary: 25-30). Similarly, Scott finds vague content to have subtexts of a passive-aggressive nature and he knows "for a fact that that is going to cause problems" (Scott: 353-358).

Despite these initial negative evaluations, however, exceptions are made for some connections (see Section 6.4). This means that a negative evaluation based on sharing the categories of information previously discussed might not lead to a negative evaluation as a whole. Equally, the categories of information shared that would normally contribute towards positive reputations can be shared at a high frequency, which can lead to a negative evaluation (see Section 6.3.5).

To a lesser extent, the quality and accuracy of content, including spelling and grammatical errors, can provoke negative evaluations. However, this is more often viewed as a *way of sharing information* rather than the content of the information and is therefore covered separately in Section 6.3.1. Likewise, content that shares political or religious views can be viewed negatively. However, the negative evaluation is generally based on *differences in opinion* rather than the fact that the information shares political or religious statements. The impact of these different *opinions* have on evaluations are shared in Section 6.3.2.

6.3 Information sharing practices that influence reputational evaluations

Whilst the previous section discussed the *categories* of information that influence reputational evaluations, this section discusses the *information sharing practices* that can influence reputational evaluations. These information sharing practices are discussed in relation to:

(1) Differences and similarities related to platform use;
(2) Differences and similarities in personal opinions or belief systems conveyed in shared information;
(3) Sharing information that is "inappropriate";
(4) The quality and accuracy of information;
(5) The frequency at which information is shared;
(6) Naming conventions including anonymity and pseudonyms; and
(7) Connections' own connections or "friends of friends").

6.3.1 Differences and similarities related to platform use

When evaluating the reputations of others, the participants in this study sometimes reflect on their own information sharing practices. This includes the ways that they use online platforms to share information or to reach different audiences. This self-reflection is sometimes used by the participants as a benchmark for the reputational evaluations of others (see Table 18 below).

Platform-based information sharing practices	Number	Names
Differences related to platform use contribute to negative reputations	24	Alan, Amanda, Andrew, Craig, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Fraser, Gillian, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Kelly, Kevin, Laura, Liam, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Roger, Sharon, Susan, Wendy, and Yvonne
Similarities related to platform use contribute to positive reputations	2	Callum and Rebecca

Table 18: Platform-based information sharing practices

Twenty-four participants in this study attribute negative views towards individuals with different information sharing practices from their own. These negative reactions are not strong enough to provoke a *purely negative* reputational evaluation on their own merit, and are often softened to a more "neutral" evaluation when given more thought. This is especially true for the 11 participants who related stories of more general differences in social media practices that were not viewed as offensive or wrong, but that were clearly different information sharing practices than those of the participant. This was illustrated by Jennifer when she said:

> I would never have shared my personal updates on Twitter … because it's a different audience. [And] when I was seeing things [on Facebook that I would not share], I was getting annoyed by it. I was like 'Why am I getting annoyed? This is Facebook, this is a place where you have friendship circles and you're supposed to know about these kinds of things in peoples' lives' (Jennifer: 34-39).

However, some conflicting practices are more likely to contribute to an overall negative reputation that others. For example, the use of profanity (Kelly: 222-225) or using the "wrong platform" to share certain categories of information, such as "chatterboxing"[22], on Facebook instead of Twitter (Emma: 368-371) or posting work-related information on a platform other than LinkedIn (Susan: 542-558). Other conflicting practices, such as sharing information about children or excessively personal information about illness and death or even mental health issues, are viewed more negatively when information is shared at a higher frequency, which is explored in Section 6.3.5.

Two participants (Callum and Rebecca) also specifically stated that they attributed *positive* reputations to individuals with similar information sharing practices to their own. Positive reputations were attributed based on similarities in the categories of information shared on different platforms because it makes them feel that their connection is "like" them (Callum: 230-235; Rebecca: 237-240). The fact that only two participants mentioned positive evaluations in regards to similar platform practices does not necessarily mean that the others do not feel positively towards those individuals with similar information practices. It might be that those practices are not noteworthy enough to them for a reputational evaluation to be shared during the course of their participation in this study.

[22] Using social media to comment on television programmes whilst watching them.

6.3.2 Differences and similarities in personal opinions or belief systems conveyed in shared information

Differences and similarities in personal opinions or belief systems, as evident though information shared online, can be used in the reputational evaluations of others. The participants in this study are more likely to evaluate reputations negatively for individuals with *conflicting* views and beliefs and positively for individuals with *similar* views and beliefs (see Table 19 below). However, this is not always the case, and reputational evaluations can change, especially when the wider context of the information is considered, as discussed in Section 6.4.

Information sharing practices	**Negative**	**Positive**
Differences in personal opinions or belief systems	(18) Amanda, Callum, David, Fraser, Gillian, Helen, James, Karen, Kelly, Kevin, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Roger, Rosemary, Scott, and Susan	(6) Heather, James, Natalie, Rebecca, Sharon, and Stephen
Similarities in personal opinions or belief systems		(10) Adrian, Alison, Gillian, Heather, Jacqueline, Karen, Kelly, Michelle, Rosemary, and Susan

Table 19: Reputational evaluations based on differences and similarities in personal opinions or belief systems conveyed in shared information

Ten participants in this study spoke about the *positive* impact that *expressed similarities* in personal opinions or belief systems had on reputational evaluation. These participants gave their connections positive reputations for several reasons. For some, it was because the similarities showed that they shared the same sense of humour (Alison: 270-277), personal or political ideals (Michelle, diary: 202-204) or that they were generally “like minded” (Gillian: 293-299). Information that confirms similar opinions and beliefs can lead to positive evaluations of connections because it can “confirm” a participant’s own political, social, or “gender specific” beliefs (Adrian: 315-317). For example, Heather stated that her political beliefs are somewhat “unique” and to find someone who shares her views is “remarkable”. These similarities lead Heather to make positive reputational evaluations (Heather: 385-389). Similarly, Karen discussed evaluating her connections’ reputations positively when their views were in alignment with her because they are the "ones who post the interesting stuff". She stated "it's valuable … because I'm getting some information I wouldn't normally [see]" (Karen: 240-247).

Six participants note that *differences* in expressed views and beliefs could be *positive* reputational markers. Here, it is not necessarily the information that creates the positive evaluation, but rather it is the way the information is conveyed and the way the information made them think. For example, three participants evaluate their connections positively because of the way they conduct themselves when sharing information that contains conflicting views (Heather: 385-392; Rebecca: 220-223; Sharon: 444-448). A further two participants (James and Stephen) looked favourably on their connections who shared different views and beliefs to them because it challenged their views (James: 219-225) and provided them with a fresh perspective (Stephen: 311-318). Similarly, Natalie discussed a connection who shares "strong views about the world" online. Despite disagreeing with these views, Natalie said "I love how she challenges the things that I think … I think she's being her authentic self which I really like" (Natalie: 410-414, 421-422).

However, differences in views and beliefs are more likely to contribute to a *negative* reputational evaluation. Twenty participants in this study discussed negative reactions towards connections based on shared information that conflicts with their own views or beliefs. This is especially true when the information is in stark contrast to a participant's views related to politics, race, and social beliefs. These views were most often discussed as overlapping themes by participants, especially in regards to immigration and refugees (Amanda, diary: 29-31; Laura, diary: 11-15; Kevin: 481-494, 504-528; Lynn: 384-388; Rosemary: 310-324). Participants also categorised a specific UK-based political party as racist, with one (James) stating that he would immediately un-friend anyone who shared anything from the group (James: 78-86).

Religious-based content is another topic that can contribute to negative reputational evaluations. In addition to politically motivated religious views (e.g. the relationship between Islam, politics, and immigration or refugee policies). Three participants (Amanda, James, and Linda) noted that another individual's religion-based content could contribute to a negative evaluation, each for a different reason. For example, James evaluated one of his connection's reputations negatively when the connection complained that members of a non-Christian faith group were celebrating one of their religious holidays on Remembrance Day. Although James does not identify with the non-Christian group, unlike his connections he felt that the group members should be allowed to celebrate their faith (James, diary: 48-49). This also led to the connection being un-friended, as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.4.

Linda, who said she had an "affinity for Richard Dawkins and atheist viewpoints", evaluated a connection's reputation negatively when the connection became "overtly religious" and started to share a large amount of "religiously themed" content (Linda: 283-300). Amanda's response to religiously themed content was not as strong as Linda's. However, she noted that she felt "cheated" when a connection shared a "religious meme" as she had not realised her friend was religious. Because Amanda does not share the same views, she found herself feeling differently towards her friend (Amanda, diary: 57-60). The same friend had previously shared politically motivated information that was contrary to Amanda's views, adding to the overall negative evaluation (Amanda, diary: 29-31).

6.3.3 The "appropriateness" of shared information

More than half of the participants in this study (26 of 45) felt that inappropriate information sharing practices led to negative reputational evaluations (see Table 20 below). Participants felt that inappropriate information was that information which should be shared discreetly, and with a select audience, or information that does not belong online at all (for example, personal or intimate information, as discussed in Section 6.2.2).

Category of information	Number	Names
All inappropriate information	26	Adrian, Alan, Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Hannah, Hazel, Helen, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Laura, Lynn, Michelle, Rachel, Roger, Scott, Sharon, and Susan
Offensive content	10	Amanda, Callum, Donna, James, Joanne, Kerry, Laura, Lynn, Rachel, and Scott
Inappropriate blurring between private and professional lives	9	Adrian, Callum, Colin, James, Karen, Kelly, Lynn, Rachel, and Susan
Complaints and "attention seeking"	6	Callum, Colin, Helen, Karen, Kelly, and Rachel
No specific category stated	10	Alan, Andrew, Emma, Fiona, Hannah, Hazel, Jennifer, Michelle, Roger, and Sharon

Table 20: Categories of "inappropriate" information that contribute to negative reputational evaluations

Ten participants felt that sharing *offensive* information was inappropriate. In all 10 cases, this includes information that is deemed to be racist and xenophobic or that uses negative language towards specific religions. In these instances, participants felt that the information should not be shared in any form – online or offline. For example, Callum noted that he would "lose a lot of respect" for a connection who shared "quite offensive" stuff about a religious group whilst Kerry evaluated connections negatively for sharing information that was "prejudiced or racist" (Callum, diary: 24-28; Kerry: 284-286).

At times, knowledge of connections' offline lives can impact the ways in which inappropriate online information practices are used in the evaluation of reputations. For example, Scott noted a struggle in evaluating some of his friends from his hometown. He thinks negatively of them for "being bigots" and sharing racist posts online. However, his offline knowledge of those connections means he is sympathetic to the motivations behind their posts and he recognised that those same connections also share "lovely posts" (Scott: 249-254). On the other hand, Rachel indicated that when connections share "pretty strong and objectionable" opinions in an offline environment, whilst presenting a "totally sanitised" version of their opinions online, she makes a negative reputational evaluation and would avoid connecting with them (Rachel: 296-300).

Sharing information that includes photographs and personal details about individuals' children is also considered inappropriate in an online environment. Five participants noted that sharing such information on social networking sites as a negative reputational marker. Whilst sharing information about children can at times prompt positive reputational evaluations (see Section 6.2.1), participants also questioned the "judgement" of their connections because of a lack of privacy for the children. For example, Amanda wrote in her diary that she would "judge friends [as being] unwise or selfish" (Amanda, diary: 25-28) whilst Joanne felt one of her connections did not "know where to draw the line on privacy". Joanne questioned whether a connection's daughter would be upset about her private information and photographs being online when she got older (Joanne: 443-447). For Kerry, however, the problem was one of the children's safety. She said that "I don't like seeing it when some of them are three or four and they keep giving them updates of what they're doing, where they're going to be, what they're going to do. [I] can see that as a really big target if the kids ever got abducted" (Kerry: 48-56). Despite feeling that it is inappropriate and a negative reputational marker, Donna will still "like" photographs that her connections share of their children because "everyone else [does] and [it would be] mean not to do so" (Donna, diary: 60-66).

Nine of these 26 participants discussed inappropriate information as it relates to the ways in which people manage the blurring between their private and professional lives. Sharing inappropriate content is one of the few information practices that participants specifically mentioned as impacting *professional reputations*, rather than "whole person" evaluations. Inappropriate information sharing in this context was largely related to sharing sensitive information about clients or complaining about colleagues or other work-related issues. For example, Callum feels that "some people just don't realise how open their Facebook and Twitter accounts are" and assume that their managers will not have access to the information. This provokes negative reputational evaluations when connections complain about work online because he feels that his connections do not "think it through" and that they fail to consider the "effect [on] their career" (Callum: 292-297). Similarly, James talked about a professional connection who shares details about sensitive client interactions on Twitter. Whilst the connection anonymises client names, the information is detailed enough that people within their industry might be able to identify the clients. James appreciates the attempt at anonymity, but does not feel that it is appropriate to share this type of information online (James: 498-505).

Another form of inappropriate information, as discussed by six participants, is related to the frequency of "negative" posts, or an abundance of posts that were viewed as complaints. This was viewed as inappropriate because it was "attention seeking" (Kelly, diary: 30-33) and a form of "courting attention". Karen acknowledged that some attention-seeking social media practices might be "a form of getting some recognition and support". However, she still thinks it is "a wrong thing to do". This leads Karen to "not want to interact with that [connection]" (Karen: 34-40). The overall impact of the frequency of information sharing on reputation is discussed in Section 6.3.5 below.

6.3.4 The quality and accuracy of information

The quality and accuracy of shared information does not usually have a *primary* impact on reputational evaluations. However, the quality and accuracy of information can influence evaluations when considered as part of an individual's wider information practices, as discussed by 28 participants. Here, the quality and accuracy of information is more likely to contribute to negative reputations (25 participants) than positive reputations (7 participants). There are two main considerations regarding quality and accuracy (see Table 21 below). The first consideration relates to sources of content that is posted by a connection, but not created by them. The second consideration relates to content created by a connection, including any commentary added to re-posted content.

The quality and accuracy of information	Number	Names
Quality and accuracy can lead to negative reputation	25	Adrian, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Craig, David, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fraser, Gillian, Hazel, Heather, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Kelly, Kevin, Laura, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Rosemary, Scott, and Susan
Quality and accuracy can lead to positive reputation	7	Gillian, Hannah, Heather, Karen, Laura, Rosemary, and Stephen

Table 21: Reasons for quality and accuracy impacting reputation

When considering the *source* of content, participants in this study are likely to look at the original author or the website from which the material originated. This includes links that direct people to an external website, for example a news site or blog, as well as images, videos, memes, or other content that is viewed within the platform. This includes information that is misleading or inaccurate. For example, outdated information sources or information that is deemed to be sensational material or conspiracy theories (David: 487-488; Michelle: 246-249; Susan: 465-468). This also includes information that is poorly communicated, for example content that contains a large amount of spelling or grammatical errors or images that are overly blurry or otherwise poor quality (Jennifer: 483-486; Kevin: 569-576; Rachel: 306-312).

When considering the quality and accuracy of content created by their connections, five participants spoke about the negative reputational implications of poor spelling, grammar, punctuation, and syntax. Four of those specifically called out "textspeak"[23] as a negative reputational marker, largely because of the "annoying" nature (Andrew: 401-403; Gillian: 304-305; Kelly: 95-97; Susan: 371-373). The *primary* reason for evaluating poor language skills negatively was because it raised questions about the quality of the information shared. Jennifer explained that this is because "if [someone] can't string a sentence together then [that is] an indicator to me that [it is not] quality content" (Jennifer: 442-450). At the same time, however, it is recognised that typos do

[23] Textspeak is a form of electronic shorthand that consists of abbreviations, emoticons, initials, letter-replacement, etc. to create messages with fewer characters.

happen (Kelly: 93-95) and that some individuals might have other issues that impact their language skills, such as dyslexia (Susan: 373-375).

Seven participants discussed “high” quality and accurate information as a positive reputational marker. This was because they felt that well-written content that linked to trustworthy external sites was an indicator that their connection was “knowledgeable”. For example, Gillian said that “good quality” information that is “useful” to her makes her “think the [her connection] would have a good reputation (Gillian: 318-319). Rosemary also noted that “well-written” content, or materials from a “reliable” source makes her “trust what [her connection] has to say” (Rosemary: 359-360).

6.3.5 The frequency at which information is shared

The majority of participants (39) felt that the frequency with which information is shared could contribute to a negative reputational evaluation. The reasons for this is that the information is deemed to be annoying or boring (see Table 22 below). This is true even if the categories of information is generally considered to be a positive influence on reputation. However, the rate of sharing that is thought to be a “high” frequency varies. For example, Callum felt that a connection who shared “several posts” of “random things” every day was sharing too often (Callum: 205-206) whilst others felt that sharing too many of the same type of post, such as especially “selfies” or “kitten videos”, was the determining factor for frequency (e.g. Hazel: 137-138; Helen, 246-261).

Reason for frequency impacting reputation	Number	Names
All reasons	39	Adrian, Alison, Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Craig, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Hazel, Helen, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Roger, Rosemary, Scott, Sharon, Stephen, Susan, Wendy, and Yvonne
It is annoying, frustrating, or irritating	28	Alison, Amanda, Diane, Donna, Emma, Gillian, Hannah, Hazel, Helen, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Laura, Liam, Linda, Michelle, Nicola, Rachel, Rosemary, Scott, Sharon, Stephen, Wendy, and Yvonne
It is boring	11	Adrian, Andrew, Colin, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Liam, Natalie, Susan, and Wendy

Table 22: Reasons for frequency impacting reputation

Most of these 39 participants (28) felt that high frequency of information sharing was “annoying”, “frustrating”, or “irritating”. For example, Michelle thought it was “annoying” because if someone was posting several times a day it meant she was not able to see what her other connections were sharing (Michelle: 284-291). Kerry shared that she will hide a connection’s posts from her Facebook timeline when they get engaged or have a baby to avoid them when “it gets annoying” (Kerry: 394-408) and Kelly admitted that she tries to give people a bit of “leeway” but after a while a high frequency of posting can “start to irritate” her (Kelly: 279-281).

Another common reason for negative evaluations based on a high frequency of sharing was that it made the information “boring”, as discussed by 11 participants. For example, Liam shared in his diary that one of his connections shares “lots of information” about her children. He wrote that “it’s almost a cliché that people post a lot about their kids, and I do find it boring and uninteresting” (Liam, diary: 26-30). Similarly, Natalie felt that one of her connections was boring when he shared “constant pictures of his post-gym selfies and food” which she thought was “utter drivel” (Natalie: 428-431).

However, for at least two participants a high frequency of information sharing resulted in neutral, rather than negative, reputational evaluations. For Colin, this is because he "[blocks] it out if [he] thinks [the information] is irrelevant" (Colin: 279-281). On the other hand, Laura finds that a high frequency of information can be welcomed if it is "mixed up in terms of the kinds of things [being shared]" (Laura: 366-375). A further two participants discussed positive evaluations being re-evaluated to a neutral based on the frequency in which information is shared because it becomes "annoying" (Karen: 72-76; Rosemary: 394-396).

In addition to the ways in which an abundance of information, or categories of information, one participant (Sharon) felt that a *lack* of sharing can also be negative. She stated that: "it's those people who either over-share, under-share, lurk, they're the people … It has a more negative perception I think" (Sharon: 395-396).

6.3.6 Naming conventions, including anonymity and pseudonyms

Naming conventions do not generally have an influence on the reputational evaluations participants make about others. The names other individuals use are viewed as a largely neutral factor, with pseudonyms being the least concern to all 45 participants (see Table 23 below). This is the case when the offline identity of the individual using the pseudonyms is clear from their profiles. For example when a username incorporates all or part of a "real name" or when there is additional information that makes the identity known, such as a bio or links to other information. Even though some pseudonym-based usernames can be viewed as "juvenile" (Jennifer: 549-552), they are generally viewed as innocuous.

The influence of naming conventions on reputation	Number	Names
The use of pseudonyms as a generally neutral factor	45	Adrian, Alan, Alison, Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Craig, David, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Hazel, Heather, Helen, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Kevin, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Roger, Rosemary, Scott, Sharon, Stephen, Susan, Wendy, Yvonne, and Zoe
The use of anonymity is a potential concern	36	Adrian, Alan, Alison, Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Craig, David, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Fraser, Gillian, Hazel, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Rosemary, Scott, Sharon, Susan, Yvonne, and Zoe

Table 23: The influence of naming conventions on reputation

Anonymity, however, is of greater concern to the participants in this study. Thirty-six participants discussed the influence that anonymity had in the evaluation of personal reputation. Only one participant (Fraser) spoke with confidence about anonymity being a negative trait, despite using an anonymous account himself (Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2). Fraser thinks that anonymity is “dishonest” and “dangerous” and generally supports efforts to eliminate anonymity online as he thinks “people become horrible” because of anonymity (Fraser: 495-500). However, Fraser acknowledged that there might be issues of safety to consider, especially for “victims of domestic violence [and members of] transgender communities”. In those cases, the safety of the individuals is deemed more important than the use of real names (Fraser: 520-525).

The remaining 35 participants shared conflicting views of the use of anonymous accounts. When considered in a wider context, anonymous accounts were generally viewed as neutral. Whereas four participants (James, Joanne, Natalie, and Scott) associated anonymity with potentially positive reputations, none of the participants viewed anonymous accounts as completely acceptable. Instead, participants spoke of initial scepticism and issues of trust, even if they understood the reasons that some individuals might chose to use anonymous accounts. For example, James questioned the levels of trust he has for professionals in his field who share “harsh” information anonymously. He feels that they are being “less than transparent” and lack the “courage to stand by their profession” (James: 517-526). Nevertheless, James accepted the anonymity of another contact who uses a friendly and open tone in her[24] online profiles (James: 531-535). Gillian, Jaqueline, and Joanne also expressed levels of conflict. Gillian stated feeling “apprehension” about information shared anonymously (Gillian: 576-577) whilst Jacqueline and Joanne questioned individuals’ motives (Jaqueline: 511-514; Joanne: 194-198). However, like Fraser, Gillian and Jacqueline both accept that some individuals might maintain anonymity because they are in situations where there might be risks if they were to identify themselves (Gillian: 575-577; Jacqueline: 530-538).

When anonymity is used to “troll” others or to share abusive, racist, or hateful information, it is considered unacceptable and a negative reputational evaluation is made. For example, Colin finds it unacceptable to “be abusive” when using an “anonymous cloak to hide who you are” (Colin: 340-341). Joanne echoed that sentiment when she spoke about abusive anonymous social media accounts where “people are hiding behind something because they’re doing what they know is bad” (Joanne: 195-198).

6.3.7 Connections’ own connections or “friends of friends”

Social networking sites are constructed in a way that reveals social circles to a wider audience, generally to a connections’ own connections and possibly to additional levels of connections as well. These secondary connections are sometimes referred to as “friends of friends”. Thirty participants spoke about the largely neutral role that their connections’ connections play in the evaluation of reputation (see Table 24).

[24] The gender of the anonymous blogger is made clear in her blog.

The impact of friends of friends on reputation	Number	Names
Friends of friend have largely neutral role	30	Adrian, Alison, Andrew, Callum, Colin, David, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Hazel, Heather, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Laura, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Roger, Scott, Sharon, Wendy, Yvonne, and Zoe
Not something that is considered	12	Adrian, Andrew, Callum, James, Joanne, Kelly, Michelle, Rachel, Scott, Sharon, Yvonne, and Zoe
Not in a place to judge	5	Alison, Hazel, Lynn, Natalie, Nicola
Context of the relationship	10	Donna, Emma, Heather, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Karen, Laura, Rebecca, Roger, Wendy

Table 24: The impact of friends of friends on reputation

The most common reason for this, shared by 12 participants, is that they do not pay attention or that is not something they “consider” (Kelly: 256-258). This was summarised by Callum when he said “what matters is the connection between that person and me … It doesn’t matter if they’re connected to [someone] I disagree with” (Callum: 267-271). A similar view is shared by five participants who feel that it is “not their place” to “judge” someone based on who they are connected with (Nicola: 517-518) and that their connections can connect to “whoever they want” (Natalie: 469-470).

Ten participants feel that the *context of the relationship* between their connections and their connections’ connections plays a role in the evaluation of reputation. For these participants, the overall impact of secondary connections is neutral. However, questions might be raised in certain contexts. Emma explained this when she said “if it’s their best friend, [and they] have an outrageous conversation [that is] offensive or [that] you disagree with … you might [start wondering] ‘why are they friends with that person?’” (Emma: 209-214). These context-based reputational evaluations are not uncommon and are addressed further in Section 6.4.

Despite the generally neutral impact that secondary connections have on reputational evaluations, five of these 30 participants (Andrew, Heather, Helen, Jennifer, and Zoe) mentioned above spoke about exceptions to the neutrality. One of those, Heather, noted both positive and negative exceptions. The positive exception related specifically to professional reputations on LinkedIn where Heather evaluated connections positively when they were "well connected". This is because she believes she might be able to leverage those connections for "information or ideas" in a professional context (Heather: 338-340). At the same time, Heather is likely to evaluate a connection negatively if they have a large number of connections on Facebook. For Heather, this "devalues the individual connection that you may have" (Heather: 341-345).

The remaining four participants who noted exceptions to the "neutrality" of secondary connections talked about the additional information that those connections provided. This additional information could contribute to a negative reputational evaluation if it showed a connection's "true colours" (Andrew: 415-417) or if it revealed "things about people [that] you didn't know before" (Helen: 428-430). Jennifer also noted that information shared by secondary connection can make her feel unsure about "the company [her own connections] keep" (Jennifer: 434-439).

6.4 The re-evaluation of reputations

The reputational evaluations made by the participants in this study are not always static. Despite potential or initial negative evaluations, there is a general sense of acceptance towards others regarding their information sharing practices. Changes to evaluations can be made for a several reasons including (1) additional information or knowledge in an online or offline environment, some of which might be conflicting; (2) the context surrounding the information, including the platform on which the information is shared; and (3) the personal philosophical or societal beliefs held by the individual making the evaluation, including a desire to "keep an open mind" (see Table 25 below).

Reason for re-evaluation	Number	Names
Additional information or knowledge	45	Adrian, Alan, Alison, Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Colin, Craig, David, Diane, Donna, Emma, Fiona, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Hazel, Heather, Helen, Jacqueline, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Kevin, Laura, Liam, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Roger, Rosemary, Scott, Sharon, Stephen, Susan, Wendy, Yvonne, and Zoe
The context of the information	31	Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Craig, Donna, Emma, Fraser, Gillian, Hannah, Heather, James, Jennifer, Joanne, Karen, Kelly, Kerry, Kevin, Laura, Linda, Lynn, Michelle, Natalie, Nicola, Rachel, Rebecca, Roger, Scott, Sharon, Stephen, Susan, and Zoe
A desire to keep an open mind	12	Adrian, Andrew, Emma, Gillian, Hannah, Hazel, Jacqueline, Jennifer, Roger, Sharon, Susan, and Wendy

Table 25: Primary reasons for re-evaluating the reputation of others

All 45 participants discussed re-evaluating initial reputational evaluations based on their possession of additional information, even if their initial evaluation was immediately negative. This includes Yvonne, who acknowledged being extremely “blunt” and definite in her evaluations of others. Despite this, Yvonne makes exceptions for young family members who post inappropriate content on Facebook stating that “you can't expect a lot of maturity from a 16-year-old” (Yvonne: 352-356). Lynn and James also re-evaluate the reputations of their relatively young connections, extending “the benefit of the doubt” to their connections due to their age. Lynn explained that she extends the benefit of the doubt to a 14-year-old girl who shares too many “selfies” (Lynn, diary: 55-58) because she knows what the girl is like in an offline environment. James talked about his “forgiveness” of a young man in his 20s who shares “unacceptable” materials. This is because of the young man’s age, as well as James’ offline knowledge of the man (James: 241-251).

In general, the participants spoke about using additional information and knowledge in the re-evaluation of reputations in vague terms. For example, Callum explained that if his only connection with someone is online, he only knows “that person they portray themselves to be”. However, he stated that “if you know that person offline and you've spoken to them in person and you know them, [you are] able to understand what they're posting a bit better or sort of interpret it in the way maybe that they want it to be shown (Callum: 258-263).

For those who offered more insight into how re-evaluated reputations were determined, it was most common for a positive reputation to be re-evaluated as negative after additional online knowledge about an individual came to light. This was especially true for the seven participants (Amanda, Andrew, Callum, Fraser, Kelly, Kevin, and Rosemary) who discussed thinking positively about connections based on some online information and then re-evaluating that reputation after the connection shared offensive content related to religion, politics, or social issues. Andrew explained that this can "show the true colours of your friend or maybe a side to them that you've never seen before" (Andrew: 416-417). However, two participants (Hannah and Heather) wrote in their diaries about re-evaluating negative reputations formed through online information as positive based on additional online content that the connections shared. In both cases, initial negative reputations had been made but after the connections shared "informed" and "intelligent" content related to politics, these "opinions" were changed (Hannah, diary: 135-137; Heather, diary: 3-6).

A further three participants (Diane, Nicola, and Rebecca) spoke specifically about a combination of online and offline information combined to elicit re-evaluated reputations. For example, Rebecca had evaluated a connection's reputation negatively based on her knowledge of the woman in offline contexts. However, after connecting online, Rebecca saw the woman's "good" side and now considers her to have a positive reputation (Rebecca: 269-271). Diane and Nicola, however, re-evaluated positive reputations, which were based on offline information, to negative because of their connections' online content. Nicola explained in her diary that her connection was hypocritical, noting the differences between her offline actions and the content that she shared online. Because of this, her "opinion" of her connection "dropped considerably" (Nicola, diary: 3-8). Diane discussed a connection whom she knew to be "smart and funny and talented" in her offline experiences with the woman. However, her connection only posts "negative" content online and "never [has] anything good to say about anything". Diane stated that this "diminishes" her reputation (Diane: 203-211).

Closely related to the notion of additional information prompting the re-evaluation of reputation is the idea of the *context* of the information, as discussed by 31 participants. Whilst the difference is subtle, the *context* of content is based on a single post (or a series of posts in a single day) rather than a wider consideration to additional information and knowledge from multiple sources. This subtlety made it difficult for participants to convey the ways in which context impacted reputation, despite knowing that it did. For example, Amanda said that "it's the sort of attitudes that they post [the content] with" (Amanda: 388-393). Gillian indicated that she interprets the "tone" of content when considering context, and that she asks herself if the person "sounds" aggressive or flippant when she reads their posts (Gillian: 302-306). Similarly, Fraser talked about comparing content between two people in determining context. To that, he discussed a wider negative evaluation for individuals who "go overboard" when posting content about children, whilst at the same time "somehow [being] interested" in updates about children that are less "saccharin" (Fraser: 119-124).

Emma also expanded on her views of the context of online information. However, she looks beyond the context of the initial post and instead considers the comments made in relations to content over time. She explained that she might "like" content in the first instance but a later review of comments might make her re-evaluate the content and the person who posted it because "the conversation" might be argumentative (Emma: 199-206).

Whilst most of these 31 participants discussed context in relation to the content, Nicola felt that the most important context in determining whether or not to re-evaluate someone's reputation was her own life. She explained that she thinks "where you're at in your life" greatly influences the ways in which people "respond to everybody else on social media". Because of this, Nicola stops to evaluate her own "mood" when she "reacts to other people's posts" (Nicola: 290-304).

The final reason given by 12 participants for re-evaluating reputations was a desire to keep an "open mind". This was either because the participants did not feel it was "their place" to make an evaluation. For example, Jennifer felt that it "wasn't very fair" of her to "judge" people on the basis of online information because "they have every right and entitlement to post whatever they [want]" (Jennifer: 259-272).

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that the evaluation of others on the basis of online information is not an intentional practice undertaken by the participants in this study. When evaluations are made, the participants use their own information practices as a benchmark for the evaluation of others – especially when the practices of others are in stark contrast to that of the participants'.

The findings also indicate that reputational evaluations are not static. Instead, they are often impacted by additional information that the participants have in relation to of the individual being evaluated. The findings presented here also show that participants generally view the information that others share online as a relatively neutral element in their overall evaluations.

In the next chapter, the findings from the first three research questions are discussed in relationship to the final research question, the two overarching research themes of this thesis, and the findings from the literature review.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the research findings presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, and addresses the fourth and final research question for this thesis, "How do information behaviours related to reputation building, management, and evaluation on social media reflect similar citation practices related to the building, management, and evaluation of academic reputation?" The discussion also addresses the findings in respect to the two overarching research themes of this study[25] (Chapter 1, Section 1.1) and the findings of the literature review (Chapter 2). It highlights the contributions of this research to knowledge in Information Science and human information behaviour and use, with specific relation to RQ4.

The discussion to follow is organised into three sections. These are:

(1) **Contributions to Information Science** (Section 7.2), as related to personal reputations, anchored in the comparisons between citation practices and related practices that are deployed on social media platforms;

(2) **Contributions to Information Science with specific relation to human information behaviour and use** (Section 7.3), including issues of boundary management, including the blurring between individuals' professional and private lives, and the evaluation of personal reputations; and

(3) **The limitations of the research sample** (Section 7.4), and the potential impact these limitations may have on the findings presented in this thesis.

7.2 Contributions to Information Science with relation to citation practices

Through the literature review that was conducted, possible similarities between citation practice and social media practices were formed in relation to the ways in which these practices are used to build and manage reputations (see Table 3, Chapter 2, page 40). The extent to which the proposed similarities may be matched are

[25] (1) The means by which people evaluate 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 (see Page 1 of Introduction, Chapter 1).

discussed below with reference to RQ4 and the new knowledge that has emerged from the empirical work conducted for this study.

7.2.1 Confirmed similarities between citation practices and related practices on social media

There are several confirmed similarities between citation practices and practices on social media, as first suggested in Table 3 (Chapter 2, page 40). These similarities help to address some of the ways in which information practices on social media reflect similar citation practices in relationship to the building, management, and evaluation of reputation. Here, these practices are matched in relation to creating alignments with others, sharing information online, and the evaluation of reputations. These are summarised on Table 26, and are discussed in detail below.

Theme	**Practices discussed in the citation analysis literature**	**Confirmed similarities in social media practice**
Linking or connecting with other individuals as a means of showing agreement or similarity	Citing someone within the main content of a paper Making note of someone in acknowledgements or footnotes of a paper Citing well-respected authors Following academics on networking platforms	Liking online content created by others Re-posting content created by others Linking user-generated content to content created by others Tagging individuals in online content
Showing disagreement with another individual	Citing someone within the main content of a paper to refute or critique the work of another (Harwood, 2009)	Commenting in a contrary manner on another individual's online content
Self-promotion	Self-citation or otherwise referencing previous works by one's self Sharing details of work on social or professional networking platforms	Linking to or posting self-created content to the social media profiles of others Cross-linking or cross-posting self-created content across several platforms

Theme	Practices discussed in the citation analysis literature	Confirmed similarities in social media practice
Strategic placement of content in favourable locations	Agreeing to coerced citations Citing well-known authors in specific fields of study Sharing through social media platforms	Tagging well-known individuals in online content via user names to form an alignment Sharing information on social media platforms
Connecting with individuals to boost own reputation	Citing well-respected authors Following academics on networking platforms	Friending, following, or otherwise connecting with individuals online
Evaluating individuals based on how they use social media	Too much online self-promotion can be seen as egotistical Self-promotion can lead to questions about oversimplification	Posting high frequency of content Posting content too many times in a single day Bragging on a regular basis

Table 26: Confirmed similarities between citation practices and related practices on social media

7.2.1.1 Similar practices related to creating alignments with others

Much of the citation analysis literature that discusses academic reputation investigates the ways in which academics create alignments between themselves and other academics. In the simplest of terms, this is done by citing the work of others, as discussed and summarised in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, page 13. When considered in relation to social media, it was proposed in this research that potentially similar practices in social media would be those of liking or re-posting content that has been created by others or by tagging individuals in user-generated content.

As detailed in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3 page 17), when an academic cites the research of another academic in their own work, they are creating a link or an alignment between that paper's author(s) and themselves (Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Ding et al., 2013; Hyland, 2003). The same is also true when academics make a note of someone in the acknowledgements or footnotes of their own work (Cronin, 1998; McCain, 2018). These links can convey a similarity or an agreement between the academic and the paper's author(s) which can help to build the citing author's academic identity and reputation (White, 2001). The findings presented in this research (Chapter 5, Sections 5.2.3 and 5.2.4, page 94) confirms that the information practices of liking, re-posting, and tagging on social media can also be used to create links or alignments between individuals in a similar manner as discussed in detail below.

The most significant of these social media practices related to creating alignments through citing another academic's work is that of re-posting the content that other social media users have created. This research shows that social media users actively building their own reputations by sharing content that they feel is relevant or interesting to their connections, as reported in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2.1, page 90. By doing this, they are signalling to their audiences that they have similar interests to the original content creator. At the same time, the practice of re-posting content signals to the content's creator that the social media user is paying attention to them and to their online activities. Forging alliances in this manner is of particular importance to the management of professional reputations, where it is important to create alignments that show social media users to be engaged in seeking and sharing information in their fields. These social media practices are similar to the citation practices of citing well-respected or senior academics as a way of creating an alignment between academics (Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Ding, et al, 2013; Hyland, 2003) as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, page 15.

The social media practice of tagging individuals in user-generated content is similar to that of providing another academic with a citation. In social media practice, tags are used as a way of signalling to the tagged individual, and to the online connections of both parties, that there either is, or should be, an alignment between the two individuals. In citation practice, the provision of a citation links two academics together in a similar manner, an alignment that becomes a part of the citing author's own identity over time (White, 2001). Social media users also tag content as a way of ensuring that content is not missed by its intended audience (generally, the tagged individual). This is especially true when the tags are used to create alignments related to a social media user's professional reputation, as discussed in Chapter 5, Section

5.2.4, page 99. This practice adds to the strength of any alignment that is created by the tag.

Social media users also interact with online content created by other social media users through likes, as a way of signalling that they are engaged with another individual's social media content. By doing so, they anticipate that their personal reputations will be viewed favourably by the content's creator (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2.3.2, page 97). In terms of citation practices, this is the same as citing a paper with the express desire of the cited author being made aware of the citer's work. Creating a favourable impression by liking content on social media is especially important when the content is created by someone in a more senior professional position, much like a junior academic "citing upwards" in their own work or citing well-respected and well-known authors (Cronin & Shaw, 2002, p. 44), as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3, page 17.

To a lesser extent, this work has shown that some social media users interact with content as a way of showing disagreement with a piece of online content specifically to manage their personal reputations (see Chapter 5, Section 5.2.3.1, page 94). This is generally done to clarify misunderstandings through commenting on content, as opposed to the creation of new content. Whilst this is not a common practice, it can be viewed as a similar practice within the citation literature related to citing another author specifically to show a disagreement between two points of view, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, page 13.

In addition to forming alliances with other academics through citations, it is possible to form alliances by connecting with fellow academics on professional or social networking platforms. This is discussed in traditional citation analysis literature (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, page 15) as well as within the growing body of research related to altmetrics (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4, page 35). In academia, the connections that are formed through citations create a link between the citer and citee, but they do not necessarily create a relationship between the two. For example, a link is created between the author of this thesis by citing others within the literature review, despite there being little or no engagement between the citing and cited authors. A lack of immediate interaction between citers and citees means that it is difficult to match citations with the practice of connecting with others on social networking sites. However, it is possible to compare the practice of tagging or "mentioning" well-respected members of professional communities (as mentioned above) to that of academic citations.

The most direct link between citation and social media practices in relationship to creating connections are that of "friending" or "following" people on social or professional networking platforms. Here, connections are made in an environment that encourages interactions. Social media users do this by requesting or accepting connections with others. However, these practices vary based on the platform in question. This is because social media users attempt to compartmentalise their private and professional connections as a way of managing their reputation, as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.1, page 111. Similarly, academics are increasingly using social networking platforms to connect with other academics where they are able to interact in an informal environment (Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Lupton, 2014a), as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.4, page 35 in relation to academics' use of social networking platforms.

7.2.1.2 Similar practices related to the strategic placement of content and self-promotion

In addition to building academic identity and reputation by creating alignments through standard citation practices, it has been shown that academics use strategic practices to intentionally place their work in favourable locations. This includes agreeing to coerced citations to secure publication in reputable journals and intentionally citing well known authors in a specific field of study (Sugimoto & Cronin, 2013; Wilhite & Fong, 2012, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.4, page 18. By doing this, academics are increasing the chances that their research will be published in a venue that will enhance their visibility, and therefore their reputation. Beyond these standard citation practices, academics are increasingly turning to alternative formats for the dissemination of their research. This includes sharing content on social media platforms as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.4, page 35.

It has been shown through this research that similar practices on social media include sharing user-generated content and interacting with other social media users through commenting on posts made to social networking platforms. Indeed, these are the two information sharing practices that are used most for the building and management of reputation. This is especially true when considering professional reputations, which tend to be of greater importance to social media users than the intentional management of their private reputations.

Social media users rarely create external content that links to other materials they have created, such as research articles. Instead, they create content that is largely self-contained information which does not rely on accessing additional content. For example, people will share information in the form of a status update, rather than linking to additional materials that they create or manage on external platforms.

To some extent, there are similarities between the ways in which academics undertake self-promotion activities using citation practices and the self-promotion practices that are undertaken by social media users in a wider social media context. In the citation analysis literature, researchers discuss the ways in which academics self-promote their research through self-citations or referencing their previous works in other materials (Bonzi & Snyder, 1991; Costas et al., 2010; White, 2001), as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2, page 15. These self-promotion practices are also noted by researchers who investigate academics' use of social media and the altmetrics that are created in the process. These practices undertaken by sharing details about academic work on social or professional networking sites, including links to published papers or details of conferences, speaking engagements, or awards (Costas et al., 2015; Stvilia et al., 2018).

In the citation and altmetrics literature, these self-citation and self-promotion practices are most often discussed in terms of sharing materials that academic have created. For example, academics will self-cite their previous papers in new research publications (Costas et al., 2010; Cronin & Shaw, 2002b; Hyland, 2003; White, 2001; Wilhite & Fong, 2012) or they will share links to conference presentations and other electronic research artefacts on social networking sites (Costas et al., 2015; Stvilia et al., 2018). This research has shown that social media can also be used for self-promotion practices as well, although not in the same manner. Here, there is little evidence that social media users reference themselves in new content that they create. However, it is clear that they share accomplishments on their social networking profiles. This includes cross-posting the same information across multiple platforms. Here, people do not cross post all of the content they create, rather they select items that will be of greater interest to audiences across their platforms, as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.1, page 88.

7.2.1.3 Similar practices related to the evaluations of others

In addition to similarities related to building and managing reputation, there are similarities between citation practices and social media practices that relate to the evaluation of the reputations of others. This includes evaluations based on both the online information practices of others and on their overall visibility.

Within the citation analysis literature, it has been suggested that the overuse of self-promotion tactics online can be viewed as egotistical (Hyland, 2003; Lupton, 2014a). Further questions have arisen regarding self-promotion practices leading to the oversimplification of complex academic work (Cronin & Crawford, 1999).

Related to this, social media users attribute negative reputational evaluations to individuals who share a high frequency of content about a single subject, including information related professional or personal successes. Of greater negative influence is the practice of humble bragging where an individual shares information related to their achievements or successes in a way that is meant to obscure the bragging or boastful nature of the content with humble overtones.

To a lesser extent, there are similarities between citation and social media practices in the ways in which evaluations are made based on an individual's overall visibility. In the citation practice, this is done by reviewing another academic's citation indexes including traditional indexes (Web of Science) and altmetrics measuring tools, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.4 page 35.

In general, social media users do not intentionally review the online footprints or social media activities of other people. However, it is not uncommon for people to review the social media practices of potential collaborators, especially in relation to professional profiles. Here, a lack of an online presence can lead to a questionable reputational evaluation. This is because a lack of information can lead to questions about someone's dedication and professionality in relationship to their work.

7.2.2 Differences between citation practices and social media practices

Whilst most of the proposed similarities between citation practices and social media practices are proven to show strong similarities, this is not the case for all practices. There are three areas of practice that do not appear to confirm the model that was proposed in Table 3 (Chapter 2, page 40). These are (1) the ways in which co-authorships and blogging practice might be similar, (2) fraudulent identity practices, and (3) the ways in which intentional reputational evaluations are sought. These differences are summarised in Table 27, and are discussed in detail below.

Theme	Practices discussed in the citation analysis literature	Differences in social media practice
Linking or connecting with other individuals as a means of showing agreement or similarity	Citing well-respected authors Co-authoring papers with well-respected academics	Hosting or providing guest blogs Linking to well-respected bloggers
Fraudulent practices or identity masking	Coercive self-citations or other citations added at the request of a publisher or editor	Sharing information online under a pseudonym or via an anonymous account
Evaluating the connections of others to determine their reputation	Reviewing list of contacts on networking platforms Reviewing reference lists in articles	Reviewing social media activities of connections Reviewing lists of online connections
Evaluating individuals based on their overall visibility	Reviewing citation indexes	Reviewing online footprints of others

Table 27: Differences between citation practices and social media practices

It was postulated at the beginning of this study that social media users might host or provide guest blogs to others as a way of creating an alignment or a connection with them. This was thought to be similar to the practice of academics co-authoring publications with others (Cronin, 1998, 2001b; Cronin et al., 2003), as discussed by in the citation analysis literature in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, page 13. Similarly, it was anticipated that the social media practice of cross-linking to other bloggers or referencing online content created by other bloggers would be similar to the practice of academics citing another academic's paper or mentioning someone in the acknowledgements or footnotes of a paper.

However, these initial assumptions about the similarities between these practices are not found to be the case. Further, there are no other social media practices revealed in this research that were found to be the same or similar practice to the citation practice of co-authorship.

This research also did not uncover fraudulent information practices on social media that are similar to coercive citation practices. Whilst this is seen in citation practices when an academic is urged to cite a specific paper or author in their papers to secure publication, this type of situation does not appear to be relevant to social media users. That is not to say that social media users do not undertake information practices that could be viewed as identity masking or that are sometimes used for fraudulent purposes. Indeed, it is common for social media users to use some sort of an altered name on at least some of their social media profiles (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1, page 78). However, their information practices are not designed to deceive others, nor are they asked to create an alliance with another individual in order to proceed with their engagement on social media platforms.

The final area of comparison where parallels have not been found is related to the evaluation of reputations. In the citation analysis literature, it has been shown that academics evaluate the reputations of their peers to determine their reputations. This is traditionally done by reviewing the reference list in a published article to determine who the author has cited, as reported in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3, page 17. A similar practice has been discussed in relation to altmetrics (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4, page 35), whereby academics will review another academic's lists of connections on social networking platforms.

It was initially believed that the related practices undertaken by social media users would be reviewing someone's list of online connections as well as reviewing the social media activities and practices of those connections. However, these practices are not generally undertaken and secondary connections have no direct influence on connections' reputations and are not used as a basis for evaluation, as reported in Chapter 6, Section 6.3.7, page 143. It is possible that this is because social media users connect with people online after an offline relationship as already been determined.

This might mean that an initial reputational evaluation has already been made. Indeed, where secondary connections might negatively impact evaluations, it is generally understood that a social media user's own connections should not be held accountable for the actions of their own online connections.

Not all of the practices noted in the citation analysis literature match with the proposed similarities in social media practice (see Table 3, Chapter 2, page 40). However, the differences between the practices are not strong enough to state conclusively that they are not, in fact, similar. Instead, it might be a likely indicator that these practices cannot be matched because of the limitations of the participant sample of this study. This will be discussed in Section 7.4 below.

7.2.3 Gaps in the knowledge related to comparisons between citation practices and social media practices

This work has been able to show where the similarities and differences exist between citation practices and social media practices. However, in the course of the data collection and analysis, further questions arose related to information practices that were not covered in the citation analysis literature.

The existing body of literature around citation practices does not discuss how the censorship of information is used by academics in the building and management of their identities or reputations. This includes a gap in the literature related to the extent to which academics might withhold citations to avoid creating alignments between their work and that of others. Missing in the literature are also discussions related to the ways in which academics might attempt to break alignments after they have been created.

However, the self-censorship of information was discussed as an important part of the social media practices that are used to build and manage personal reputations – especially as it relates to professional personas and reputation, as reported in Chapter 5, Section 5.3, page 101. Some of these censorship practices are related to the ways in which social media users decide to connect with others online, including which platforms they use for different types of connections.

Whilst not a gap in knowledge, an area of research that needs to be expanded upon from the citation analysis literature is related to the reasons or motivations behind citation practices. We know that academics cite other academics and we know how those citations might impact an academic's identity and reputation. However, there are few small interview studies related to their motivations to cite (for example, Harwood, 2009; Harwood & Petrić, 2012). Lacking, however, are large-scale investigations into the motivations behind academic citations.

These gaps in the discovered knowledge serve to highlight a lack of research into the ways in which self-censorship is used in citation practices. They also highlight the limited amount of research that currently exists emphasising the motivations behind academics decisions to cite other researchers.

Together, these gaps in knowledge, along with the confirmed similarities and differences between citation and social media practices, create new contributions to Information Science as it pertains to citation analysis research. It also specifically addresses the fourth research question for this study, "How do information behaviours related to reputation building, management, and evaluation on social media reflect similar citation practices related to the building, management, and evaluation of academic reputation?", which is the overarching research question for this work that addresses the findings from the first three research questions (see Table 2, page 39) that are shared in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In addition to the contribution to theory related to citation practices, this work makes contributions to the existing knowledge related to human information behaviour and use, as discussed in Section 7.3 below.

7.3 Contributions to Information Science with relation to human information behaviour and use

The research presented in this thesis also contributes to the broader domain of Information Science with relation to human information behaviour and use. Through the literature review conducted for this research, (Chapter 2) it was suggested that these contributions include new knowledge related to individuals' "whole" lives in regards to managing online information. It was further thought that this work would contribute new knowledge around the evaluation of personal reputation by individuals, as opposed to by professionals such as those working in human resources or employment management positions (see Table 3, Chapter 2, page 40).

The discussion below highlights this new knowledge with contributions to four broad areas. These are (1) showcasing aspects of identity as a form of reputation management, (2) boundary management practices, (3) the censorship of information, and (4) the evaluation of personal reputation. Table 28 below summarises these in relation to the suggested contributions found in the literature review (Table 4, Section 2.5.3, page 44).

Questions raised	**Level of coverage in the extant literature**	**Contributions to knowledge**
How do individuals manage online information regarding their combined professional and private reputations as one "personal" reputation? How do individuals decide how to represent their identities on online platforms?	*Limited* Individuals use self-regulation techniques to manage the information that they will share, and with whom they will share it. Individuals share different types of information on different types of platforms. Individuals manage information sharing and connections specifically for the blurring (or separation) of their private and professional lives. Individuals might use pseudonyms and anonymous accounts to "experiment" with personalities or identities online These may, or may not, be linked back to an offline identity later.	This is the first academic study to have focused on individuals' "whole" lives in regards to managing online information. It has shown that identity is largely viewed as a single entity, but that by presenting different personas parts of an individual's "whole" self can be showcased for different audiences.

Questions raised	**Level of coverage in the extant literature**	**Contributions to knowledge**
How do individuals decide what information to share online, and where to share it? To what extent do individuals intentionally engage in reputation building?	*Limited* Individuals manage reputation by masking or hiding activities or personal information for the purposes of seeking or sharing information. This is achieved using pseudonyms and anonymous accounts, or by deliberately not providing profile information on platforms.	This is the first academic study to have investigated the ways in which individual share information as a way of building and managing their "whole" life reputation. It has shown that, whilst reputation is largely considered as a whole entity, it is managed differently to protect certain aspects of reputation.
To what extent are individuals evaluating the reputations of others based on the information found about them online? To what extent does the quality of information collected influence the determination of individuals' reputations? How does offline knowledge of an individual influence the evaluation of information gathered about them from online sources?	*Limited* The quality and accuracy of information influences reputation evaluations, as does information that is outdated and no longer accurate. Those with whom individuals are directly connected can influence their reputations, as can their second-level connections.	This is the first academic study to investigate the reputational evaluations of individuals' own connections on the basis of online information. It has shown that the practice of evaluating reputation is rarely done intentionally and that reputational evaluations are not static.

Table 28: Themes identified in the literature relevant to the research and the questions raised from the apparent gaps in the extant knowledge

7.3.1 Showcasing aspects of identity

At the beginning of this thesis, it was discussed that the intentional act of creating or building identity might form a crucial element in the building and management of personal reputation. This included the use of pseudonyms and anonymous accounts, as well as general principals related to the "presentation of self" as first discussed by Goffman in 1959.

Prior research has shown that anonymous accounts can be used to mask identity for information seeking and sharing purposes or as a way of "testing" new identities or behaviours (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Pedersen, 1997). Further, is has been argued that pseudonyms are a common form of identity online and that the use of information to showcase different aspects of individuals' lives allows for the portrayal of different selves in an online environment (Boyd, 2012), as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1, page 20.

This research has generated new insights into to the use of pseudonyms and anonymous accounts. It has found cases where anonymity is rarely used and that, when it is, the practice is not intended to hide identities. It has found that a greater number of social media users deploy pseudonyms online. These alternative names are not used as a way of masking identity, but are rather used to demarcate between different personas or different intended audiences (private or professional).

This research has shown that, in general, social media users do not consider their identities as separate from their reputation. In fact, their efforts to showcase different aspects of their single identities are done by the presentation of "personas" which are largely based on their private or professional lives. The idea that social media users are presenting personas appears consistent with Goffman's model as presented in his seminal work *The presentation of self in everyday life* (Goffman, 1959). However, the portrayal of different personas is not generally done as a way of creating identity. Instead, social media users present different personas to different audiences as a way of building or managing personal reputations. This is done in part by deploying different information sharing practices based on the social networking platform and the perceived audience.

Despite the presentation of different personas, there remains a desire to project genuine representations of a single "whole person" identity. This means that personas are used to showcase parts of an authentic, "real world" identity. This authentic presentation of self in an online environment confirms earlier works by Uski and Lampinen (2014) and Fieseler, Meckel and Ranzini (2014), as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2, page 26. Indeed, even when social media users employ alternative naming conventions as a way of "hiding" in plain sight, the practice is done as a form of reputation building and management rather than as a way of creating alternative identities, as reported in Chapter 4, Section 4.2, page 71.

Through presenting different personas, social media users are managing boundaries between different aspects of their lives. This includes boundaries between people's professional and private lives as well as between different groups of connections.

In the first instance, this is done by showcasing aspects of identity by the portrayal of personas. These personas are intended to highlight the professionalism that social media users wish to convey to their colleagues or other professional connections. To a lesser extent, this is done to protect private reputations or to manage the personal relationships that exist with family and friends on private platforms.

Whereas the literature discussed in this thesis on presentation of personas and the development of identity focuses on how online information sharing practices are deployed in relation to online and offline identities of an individual (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2, page 26), this work has shown that the personas that social media users display are first and foremost about reputation management – not identity building and creation. In general, professional personas are deployed on professional platforms, or for professional audiences where private personas are deployed on private platforms for private connections. Social media users manage the boundaries between these different aspects of their lives as a larger part of managing their "whole self" reputations.

7.3.2 Boundary management

This research has shown that one of the key determinations that social media users make regarding how and if they will share information online is the perceived purpose of the platform. The primary motivation for these information behaviours is to manage the boundaries between social media users' private and professional lives, as part of the whole life management of their personal reputations. Here, it has been shown that social media users share relevant information based on the categorisation of the platform, for example the use of Facebook for private information sharing practices and LinkedIn for sharing information with professional connections. This is discussed in the literature in regards to the use of a specific social networking platform to communicate to certain types of information as a way of presenting one's self appropriately for the audience (Boyd & Heer, 2006; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Lingel & Boyd, 2013; Lund, 2012; Millham & Atkin, 2018; Wessels, 2012; Yang et al., 2017), as highlighted in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2, page 26. These information practices are deployed to ensure the appropriateness of the information shared for the audience on the platform, which is curated to ensure that the connections match the platform's purpose (professional connections on professional platforms).

Whilst connections are generally developed to create alignments, they are managed in a way that helps to keep the boundary between professional and private lives separate. Professional connections are generally maintained on professional networks and private connections are maintained on private networks. Managing the boundaries between the two areas on an individual's life is done in part to prevent awkward situations between online and offline environments. As with the portrayal of persona, these boundary management practices are largely undertaken as a way to protect, build, or manage professional reputations in the first instance, with less intentionality provided for the management of private reputations.

As part of their overall reputation management practices, social media users also undertake information censorship practices. These information behaviours are part of their wider boundary management practices, and as discussed in detail in Section 7.3.3 below.

7.3.3 Information censorship

This work has shown that social media users undertake information censorship practices as way of building and managing their reputations. Whilst these information behaviours are largely undertaken as a way of ensuring that their "whole self" reputation is protected, these information practices are also managed in a way that creates a boundary between social media users' private and professional lives, as discussed in Section 7.3.2 above.

In this research, as well as in the existing research discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, page 19, it has been shown that censorship is exercised by social media users, as reported in the findings in Chapter 5, Section 5.3, page 101. This is done by restricting the access of certain groups from viewing certain information, at times based on the platforms. These censorship practices can be undertaken wholesale, or through the use of privacy settings. Social media users also censor the views that they share on social media, or the extent to which those views are shared. In the literature discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2, these censorship practices are often undertaken though the use of privacy settings that prevent some connections from accessing certain information (Lupton, 2014a; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) or by settings that restrict access to an entire social media profile platform (Carmagnola et al., 2013; Das & Sahoo, 2011; Mesch & Beker, 2010).

Social media users' information censorship practices extend beyond censoring original content, and are used in relation to interactions with others as well. This includes censoring comments and likes that they might make on content created by other social media users, especially if that interaction could be interpreted as them making a statement about their own views or beliefs, as reported in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.3, page 106. As with other information sharing practices, social media users censor interactions as a way of managing their reputations.

In addition to censorship practices that are undertaken prior to information being shared, social media users censor information after it has been shared, as reported in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.4, page 108. This practice is done by deleting or editing content after it has been shared, and is most commonly undertaken when information is later found to contain an error. Whilst this form of censorship is not practiced by the majority of social media users, it is of great importance to those who want to ensure that their professional reputation is one that is built on quality information sharing practices.

7.3.4 Evaluations of personal reputations

The evaluation of reputations is rarely undertaken as an intentional process. Instead, the process tends to be a passive one that is not necessarily apparent to those making the evaluations. This is in contrast to research on reputational evaluations by human resources or admissions officers (Carmagnola et al., 2013; Das & Sahoo, 2011; Lupton, 2014a; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013), as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3.4, page 28. Indeed, many social media users feel that it is not their place to make evaluations about others. When evaluations are made, they are generally benchmarked against a social media user's own information practices and overall information behaviours. This includes platform-based practices, the management of private and professional boundaries, and the appropriateness of any information that is shared information. The other benchmark that social media users consider is that of personal values and opinions. This means that those who hold contrary views related to politics, religion, or social ideals are evaluated more readily than those who hold similar views – and also more negatively.

However, evaluations that are made based on online information are not static. Instead, social media users consider the wider context in which their connection is known, and take into account additional information they have about them from both online and offline sources. Ultimately, most social media users give their connections fairly neutral evaluations because of this.

It is also possible that the evaluations of connections are "pre-evaluated" before an online connection is made, based on an existing offline connection. This might mean that people are connected to those that they have already pre-screened to some extent.

7.4 Limitations of the sample in relation to the findings of this research

The study participants represented in the doctoral investigation are generally highly-educated professionals working in information-based industries. This may account for the strong message from the findings that participants regarded their professional reputations to be of greater priority than their private reputations, and that their information behaviours reflect those priorities. This is especially evident in the analysis of data on the information sharing strategies deployed to manage both professional and private connections on social media platforms (especially Facebook).

It is also the case that several participants expressed difficulties in determining whether the information that they post online should be considered professional or private because of the blurring between these elements of their lives. This is especially true for those participants who view their own identity through their professional roles.

It is also possible that some of the information quality aspects related to the evaluation of reputation is due to the professional and managerial roles that the participants undertake. Here, participants are interested in both the quality and accuracy of the information itself as well as the way in which the information is conveyed. It is possible that these information behaviours could be related to the education levels of the study participants as well as their professional employment roles.

This limited study population was not intentionally created. Rather, it comprised individuals who volunteered for the study based on a participant call online. It is possible that the channels used to reach potential participants (predominately Twitter) might have impacted the sample and that a wider mix of participant would have resulted in a greater spectrum of online information practices. However, this unintentionally narrow sample might provide the basis for a larger investigation that considers how additional groups of people might use online information to build, manage, and evaluate personal reputation, as recommended in the conclusion of this thesis in Chapter 8, Section 8.4.2, page 176.

7.5 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter has highlighted the contributions of this research to knowledge in Information Science and human information behaviour and use. It has shown that the proposed model of comparison between citation practice and social media practice has a strong set of similarities, and that the gaps in knowledge might prove to be an interesting area for future work. This discussion has also shown that it is possible to consider of individual's "whole life" in regards to personal reputation management from an everyday life perspective.

Importantly, this discussion has highlighted the need for further investigation into both citation practice and human information behaviour and use. These are detailed in the next chapter, the conclusion.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research reported in this thesis has been to investigate the role of online information in the building, management, and evaluation of personal reputations with an aim to develop new knowledge related to the two research themes, as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.1. This was achieved through the development of a theoretical framework that considers the extent to which social media users replicate the established information practices of academics through their information behaviours in online environments, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5. This work was conducted with reference to the broader Information Science literature on human information behaviour and use, including aspects of bibliometric research that focuses on citation practice and citation analysis.

In this chapter, the research findings are revisited in relation to the two research themes, and conclusions are drawn as to their overall significance to the field of Information Science. The ways in which this work has contributed to existing knowledge related to citation practices and human information behaviour and use are also outlined here. Finally, recommendations are provided for academics on the potential for future research related to the use of online information in the building, management, and evaluation of reputation.

8.2 Summary of the research findings

Before reviewing the contributions of this research to the existing knowledge in Information Science, it is prudent to revisit the research findings that support the contributions. Here, a summary of the research findings is presented as they relate to the two overarching research themes.

8.2.1 Research theme 1: The means by which people evaluate the personal reputations of others from the online evidence available to them

The first research theme is addressed with the last of three research questions, *How do individuals evaluate the reputations of others based on the information available to them online?* The findings related to this theme shows that:

- Social media users do not actively and intentionally evaluate the reputations of their online connections.
- When evaluations are made, social media users consider their own online information practices as a benchmark for evaluations. Benchmarking is done based on:
  - Information practices, including how platforms are used, the frequency at which information is shared, and the type of information that is shared
  - Alignments of personal beliefs and values, including religion, politics, and societal issues
- Evaluations are not static. Additional information about an individual (from online or offline sources) can be used to create exceptions for otherwise “negative” reputational evaluations.

8.2.2 Research theme 2: How people manage their own personal reputations through their use of online information

The second research theme is addressed with the first two of three research questions, *How do individuals use information to build identities for themselves online?*, and *How do individuals use online information to build and manage their reputations?* The findings related to this theme shows that:

- Social media users *present aspects of identity*, rather than to build or create identity in its own right and are used as a way of managing reputation.
- Personas are showcased to highlights different aspects of an individual’s identity for different audiences, or as a way to manage the blurring between both participants’ professional and private lives and their online and offline environments.

- Social media users share different types of information on different platforms based on their perceived function as a professional or private platform, and the intended audience for that platform.
- Intentional reputation building and management practices are more likely to be undertaken when considering social media users' professional reputations. Private reputations are of less importance.
- Information censorship is an important part of social media users' overall information sharing practices for the building and management of personal reputation.
- In general, social media users build and manage their reputations by managing the blurring between their professional and private lives.

8.3 Contributions to existing knowledge

The research findings make several contributions to knowledge to the domain of Information Science related to citation analysis and human information behaviour and use, in the area online information and personal reputation management.

8.3.1 Contributions to the domain of citation analysis

The findings shared in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 in relation to the first three research questions (Chapter 2, Table 2) helped to answer the final research question for this work, "How do information behaviours related to reputation building, management, and evaluation on social media reflect similar citation practices related to the building, management, and evaluation of academic reputation?", as discussed in Chapter 7. In general, the findings of this research demonstrate that social media users do replicate the established information practices of academics in online contexts, specifically that of social networking platforms.

Where the similarities between citation practice and social media practice are uncertain, this work has suggested that a wider investigation into specific types of social media practice (for example, blogging) might uncover an even greater level of similarity. This is especially relevant as the use of altmetrics increases along with the overall use of social networking platforms by academics. It is therefore possible that a larger study investigating the intersections between traditional citation practices, altmetrics, and social media practice might be in order.

8.3.2 Contributions to the domain of human information behaviour and use

This research has also made important contributions to the human information behaviour and use literature, specifically as it relates to the ways in which individuals use online information to build, manage, and evaluate "whole life" reputations within an everyday life context – amongst those who hold professional and managerial work roles – as shared in the three findings chapters of this thesis (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) and as discussed in Chapter 7. This work has shown that when social media users think about managing their reputations from a whole life context, they tend to concentrate first and foremost on a single aspect of their reputation – that which is related to their professional life.

A further contribution is the ways in which this work highlights the distinction between the intertwined concepts of persona, identity and reputation in online environments. The research presented in this thesis shows that information shared on social media platforms *presents* identity (taking into account that some individuals feel that their identity comprises multiple personas) and that those presentations of identity or personas contributes to the building and management of reputation. Further, this work highlights the fact that social media users build and manage their reputations online by considering their understandings of a platform's primary function in determining how to manage online connections and what information to share or censor.

8.4 Future work

In addition to the contributions of this thesis to the existing knowledge related to citation analysis and human information behaviour and use, this work has also highlighted additional gaps in knowledge that would benefit from future work. These areas for further work or consideration are highlighted below.

8.4.1 Recommendations for future work in the domain of citation analysis

In regards to research in the field of citation analysis, this work has uncovered a need to further explore citation practices from a qualitative standpoint. Specifically, it would be useful to:

- ► Explore the motivations and decision-making processes that academics use in determining which articles they will cite as well as their decisions to not cite similar work. Whilst there has been limited work in this regard in the past, it is recommended that a larger investigation be considered that incorporates the use of altmetrics and other non-standard academic communication and dissemination tools (including the use of social networking platforms).
- ► Consider the longevity of any academic alignments made through citation practices as well as the ways in which academics might break alignments if the need arises. For example, if an academic's reputation within their field becomes a negative influence on a citing author, what steps can they take to break an alliance that was forged through citations or co-authorships in the past?

8.4.2 Recommendations for future work in the domain of human information behaviour and use

In regards to research related to human information behaviour and use, there are several areas of further research that are recommended. This are:

- ► An expanded investigation into the online information practices of a wider number of demographic groups, using the research presented here as a basis for how highly educated social media users working in professional industries as a comparison for groups of individuals from other employment sectors or educational backgrounds. This would be especially prudent in those industries where there is a greater blurring between individual's private and professional lives. Ultimately, the research related to human information behaviour and use could be replicated with a wide range of groups and social media user types, for example, those based on geography, cultural differences, and digital literacy skills.

- An investigation specifically around issues of boundary management in a social media context related to the blurring between individual's private and professional lives. For example, it would be useful to investigate intentional reputation building practices through professional information sharing on blogging platforms or other long-form communication methods. It would also be useful to investigate further the ways in which anonymity is used in the process of managing the blurring between these different segments of an individual's life.
- An investigation that considers elements of individuals' lives, as opposed to the "whole life" focus of this thesis. The participants in this study spoke to some degree about their sharing (or censorship) behaviours related to certain aspects of their personal lives, but the scope of the study did not allow for a deeper investigation into these themes. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to consider how information behaviours are deployed in an online context related a single context. For example, significant life events or life stages such as, retirement, parenthood, bereavement, or other significant changes to personal relationships (marriages, divorce).

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Appendix A: Interview guide for pilot study

Conversation starters:

Tell me about how you use your social networking accounts.

> (Thinking about the focus of this research, what can you tell me about your own online activities as they related to reputation management?)

Tell me a bit about your thoughts on other people's social media use.

> (Again, thinking about the focus of this research, what can you tell me about other people's social media use and how you evaluate their reputations?)

Prompting questions:

Can you expand on that?

Can you share any examples?

Can you tell me anything else?

Why do you think that is?

Theme 1: Sharing

How do you decide what to share?

> What kind of things do you do on different platforms?
>
> How do you decide? What are the guiding principles?
>
> How do you alter your sharing practices according to your connections?
>
> > How about privacy settings?
> >
> > How do you share differently based on who can access it?
> >
> > What do you know about "personal branding"? What do you think it means, and do you do it?

What about decisions on what *not* to share?

What about retweeting or sharing posts by others?

Tell me about a time you deleted something you've shared.

Or changed the privacy settings?

Can you tell me about a time you regretted sharing something?

Theme 2: Connecting

How do you decide who to connect with? (Follow, friend, etc)

How does the platform make a difference?

How are considerations made based on who *they* are connected to?

What about professional versus private connections?

Can you tell me about how you connect with certain types of people? Why?

What about connecting with businesses, groups, or hobbies? Such as following Coke on Twitter or liking a knitting page on Facebook?

Theme 3: Naming conventions and privacy

Some people use pseudonyms or anonymous accounts. What are your thoughts on those?

There are some conflicting views on how many accounts or online “identities” someone should have. Do you have any thoughts about this?

Can you tell me about your own use of pseudonyms or anonymous accounts?

With pseudonyms, how important is it that your real name is kept separate from the pseudonym?

Is it a form of anonymity for you?

Are there any cross-overs between accounts with different names?

How does this tie in to any personal brands you might be maintaining?

Theme 4: Blurring of worlds

How much separation do you feel there is between your online and offline worlds?

What kind of things do you do to keep the two separate (in all or some areas)?

What about in your private versus professional lives?

Theme 5: Evaluating others

Can you tell me how you evaluate others online?

How do you decide if information is true or accurate?

How do you decide what information to trust?

How does the age of information impact your evaluation?

What role does an individual’s connections/friends have in evaluating their reputation?

What impact do their connections' behaviours or reputation have on your evaluation?

And business, pages, or hobbies they've "liked" or connected to?

How does your knowledge of an individual in an "offline" context make a difference?

Theme 6: Searching and platform use

What about searching for yourself online?

How often?

Can you tell me about a time you were surprised by what you find? (Or didn't find?)

What have you done to change your search results? (Making something more visible; hiding something from view.)

Tell me about searching for other people online.

Why? How?

What do you do with the information?

What are your thoughts on people who do not have an online profile – or who have a very limited footprint?

How would that change if it's someone you know offline?

What online platforms do you use? Which do you avoid?

Why/why not?

Theme 7: Interactions

How do you decided who to mentioning (such as @ mentions on Twitter or Instagram) or tag on posts (Facebook, etc.)? Or when to *not* tag someone?

Can you tell me about a time when you've untagged yourself? Or when someone asked you to un-tag them in a post?

How do you handle questions of linking to other people's materials on your blogs or websites?

What about the idea of guest blogs? Either by you on another blog or hosted on your own blog? (Again, personal branding.)

What about commenting on posts? What kind of things would make you not want to comment? (Topic, friends-of-friends, privacy settings)

What about liking or favouriting posts?

Appendix B: Full participant list

Pseudonym (Gender)	Generation (Age)	Education	Job-sector	Social media use	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	Social media experience compared to:		
								Family	Friends	Co-workers
Adrian (M)	BB (59)	Bachelors	Professional, scientific, and technical	Moderate	Daily	Weekly	Weekly	About the same	About the same	Somewhat less
Alan (M)	BB (61)	Masters	Public administration	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	Weekly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Somewhat more
Alison (F)	BB (53)	Bachelors	Education	Moderate	Daily	Weekly	n/a	Somewhat less	Somewhat more	About the same
Amanda (F)	Gen-X (45)	Masters	Health	Moderate	Daily	Daily	n/a	About the same	About the same	About the same
Andrew (M)	Gen-Y (22)	Bachelors	Professional, scientific, and technical	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Daily	Considerably more	Considerably more	Considerably more
Callum (M)	Gen-Y (23)	A-levels	Social Housing	Moderate	Weekly	Weekly	Weekly	Considerably more	About the same	Somewhat more
Colin (M)	BB (63)	Masters	Information and communication	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Daily	Considerably more	Somewhat more	About the same
Craig (M)	Gen-Y (27)	Bachelors	Information and communication	Heavy	Monthly	Daily	Daily	Considerably more	About the same	Somewhat more
David (M)	BB (55)	PhD	Professional, scientific, and technical	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Don't know
Diane (F)	BB (56)	Bachelors	Prefer not to answer	Heavy	n/a	Daily	Monthly	Don't know	Don't know	Don't know
Donna (F)	Gen-Y (33)	Masters	Information and communication	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	Monthly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	About the same
Emma (F)	Gen-Y (28)	Masters	National Governing Body	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly	About the same	About the same	Somewhat more
Fiona (F)	BB (61)	Masters	Professional, scientific, and technical	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	Weekly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Somewhat less
Fraser (M)	Gen-Y (34)	PgDip	Technology	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Considerably more	Considerably more	Considerably more
Gillian (F)	Gen-X (38)	Bachelors	Public administration	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Daily	Considerably more	About the same	Don't know
Hannah (F)	Gen-Y (30)	Masters	Voluntary sector	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Somewhat more	About the same	About the same
Hazel (F)	BB (60)	Masters	Information and communication	Light	Weekly	Monthly	n/a	Considerably more	Somewhat less	Somewhat less
Heather (F)	Gen-Y (28)	Masters	Charity sector communications	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Somewhat more
Helen (F)	Gen-X (50)	A-levels	Health	Moderate	Daily	n/a	n/a	Somewhat less	About the same	About the same
Jacqueline (F)	Gen-X (49)	Bachelors	Business administration and support services	Moderate	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Considerably more	Considerably more	Considerably more
James (M)	Gen-X (44)	PgCert	Professional, scientific, and technical	Moderate	Daily	Daily	n/a	Somewhat more	About the same	Somewhat more
Jennifer (F)	Gen-Y (31)	Masters	Not-for-profit	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Considerably more
Joanne (F)	Gen-X (44)	Masters	Professional, scientific, and technical	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Considerably more	About the same	Considerably more
Karen (F)	Gen-X (40)	Masters	Environment	Moderate	Daily	n/a	Weekly	Somewhat more	About the same	Somewhat more
Kelly (F)	Gen-X (35)	GCSEs	Business administration and support services	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	n/a	About the same	Somewhat less	Somewhat less
Kerry (F)	Gen-Y (27)	Masters	Education	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Considerably more	Considerably more	Somewhat more

Pseudonym (Gender)	Generation (Age)	Education	Job-sector	Social media use	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	Social media experience compared to:		
								Family	Friends	Co-workers
Kevin (M)	Gen-X (35)	Bachelors	Professional, scientific, and technical	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Considerably more
Laura (F)	Gen-X (35)	PgDip	Education	Moderate	Daily	Monthly	Daily	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Somewhat more
Liam (M)	Gen-Y (27)	Masters	Motor trades	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Considerably more	About the same	Don't know
Linda (F)	BB (54)	Masters	Education	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Considerably more	About the same	Somewhat more
Lynn (F)	Gen-X (37)	PhD	Professional, scientific, and technical	Moderate	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Considerably more	About the same	Somewhat less
Michelle (F)	Gen-X (37)	Bachelors	Public administration	Moderate	Daily	Daily	n/a	About the same	About the same	Somewhat more
Natalie (F)	Gen-Y (26)	Bachelors	Information and communication	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Daily	Considerably more	Considerably more	Considerably more
Nicola (F)	Gen-X (41)	PgCert	Education	Heavy	Daily	Weekly	Weekly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Considerably more
Rachel (F)	BB (57)	PhD	Information and communication	Moderate	n/a	Daily	n/a	Somewhat more	About the same	Don't know
Rebecca (F)	Gen-Y (33)	PhD	Education	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Somewhat more	About the same	Somewhat more
Roger (M)	BB (69)	PhD	Education	Moderate	Weekly	Daily	Monthly	About the same	Somewhat more	Somewhat more
Rosemary (F)	BB (53)	PhD	Education	Light	Daily	Daily	Monthly	About the same	Somewhat more	About the same
Scott (M)	Gen-Y (26)	A-levels	Retail	Light	Daily	Monthly	Monthly	Somewhat more	About the same	Don't know
Sharon (F)	Gen-X (45)	Masters	Information and communication	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Considerably more	Considerably more	Considerably more
Stephen (M)	BB (61)	PhD	Health	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Somewhat more	About the same	Somewhat more
Susan (F)	BB (51)	GCSEs	Public administration	Heavy	Daily	Daily	Monthly	Considerably more	Considerably more	About the same
Wendy (F)	BB (51)	PhD	Professional, scientific, and technical	Moderate	Daily	Daily	Weekly	Considerably more	Somewhat more	Don't know
Yvonne (F)	Gen-X (38)	PhD	Education	Moderate	Weekly	n/a	Daily	Considerably more	Considerably less	Considerably more
Zoe (F)	Gen-Y (34)	PhD	Professional, scientific, and technical	Light	Daily	n/a	n/a	About the same	Considerably less	Considerably less

Appendix C: Background questionnaire

Participant survey for research into the role of online information in personal reputation

Page 1 of 2

This short survey is designed to collect additional information about participants in a PhD research study regarding the role of online information in reputation management.

Edinburgh Napier University requires that all persons who participate in research studies give their written consent to do so. Please read the following and proceed if you agree with what it says.

- I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in this research conducted by Frances Ryan, a PhD student in the Edinburgh Napier University School of Computing.

- I have been informed of the broad goal of this research study.

- I have been told that my responses will be anonymised.

- I also understand that if at any time I feel unable or unwilling to continue, I am free to leave.

- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding this study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

- I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study.

Please contact Frances Ryan [redacted] with any questions about this survey or research.

Thank you!

1. Do you wish to proceed with this survey?

- **Yes, I wish to proceed.**
- **No, I do not wish to proceed.**

Continue later

Participant survey for research into the role of online information in personal reputation

Page 2 of 2

1. **Name**

   This will be used to match your responses with your participation diary and interview, and should match the name provided to the researcher.

2. **Email address**

   This will only be used by the researcher for follow-up communications regarding the study.

3. **Date of birth**

   Please enter your birth date, month, and year.

4. **Gender**

5. **Highest level of academic qualification**

6. **What employment sector do you/did you last work in?**

   Please select the option that best fits your job sector. If you are retired, a student, or otherwise not employed, please select your most recent job sector.

7. **How long have you been using the Internet?**

8. **When did you first start using social networking sites?**

9. **How would you rate your level of use of social networking sites or blogs?**

   By social networking sites, we mean sites where you can create a personal profile/account, even if you don't have an account. (Example: You might view content on Twitter, even though you do not have an account on the site.)

10. **How would your FRIENDS rate your level of use of social networking sites or blogs?**

    By social networking sites, we mean sites where you can create a personal profile/account, even if you don't have an account. (Example: You might view content on Twitter, even though you do not have an account on the site.)

11. Which online social media platforms do you have accounts with?

For each platform listed below, please select the response that best fits your use.

	Do not have account	Have account but never use	Have account and use infrequently (e.g. monthly or less often)	Have account and use occasionally (e.g. weekly)	Have account and use frequently (e.g. daily)
Facebook					
Twitter					
Instagram					
Google+					
Pinterest					
LinkedIn					
Flickr					
Tumblr					
MySpace					
YouTube					
WordPress					
Blogger					
Other					

Other comments? (If you selected "other" please list them here)

0 / 2000

12. Compared with your FAMILY how experienced do you feel you are with using social media?

Considerably less	Somewhat less	About the same	Somewhat more	Considerably more	Don't know

Feel free to comment:

0 / 2000

13. Compared with your FRIENDS how experienced do you feel you are with using social media?

Considerably less	Somewhat less	About the same	Somewhat more	Considerably more	Don't know

Feel free to comment:

0 / 2000

14. Compared with your CO-WORKERS how experienced do you feel you are with using social media?

Considerably less	Somewhat less	About the same	Somewhat more	Considerably more	Don't know

Feel free to comment:

0 / 2000

Continue later

Appendix D: Participant instructions for diaries

Guidelines for diary completion

Thank you for agreeing to keep a diary as part of my PhD study. This one-week diary is specifically interested in your thoughts and actions regarding information that contributes to online reputation management and evaluation.

The purpose of this diary is to record your thoughts and process when interacting with social media. You do not need to do anything special or different other than keep this diary. There are no minimum time commitments. However, from your usual practice, the more you record in the diary, the more data I will have to work with.

The research is concerned with the role of online information in the creation, building, and evaluation of personal reputations. You are invited to share your thoughts on how you evaluate the reputations of others and what actions you take (or don't take) to manage your own reputation by using online information.

Sample entries might look like this:

> I feel that Friend A is a good cook because they always share photos of the food they cook. Friend B posts links to conspiracy theory sites and it makes me think s/he is insane.
>
> I didn't share a link on Facebook because I don't want my Mum to know that I support a certain group. Instead, I shared it on Twitter because she doesn't have access to that account.
>
> I changed my profile picture on Instagram because I want people to see how fantastic my new haircut is.
>
> I think Friend C is really funny and smart. She always posts great statuses on FB and Twitter and always writes really good comments on other people's stuff. She also writes some insightful blog posts about current events, and I trust her opinions.

Feel free to add more detail if that helps you to keep the diary. You are also free to share other thoughts and opinions about how you create, manage, and evaluation reputations. **And remember: The more you record, the more data I have to work with.**

Social networking sites and blogging platforms:

There are many social networking sites. Whilst Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram are some of the most popular, you are free to talk about any platforms you would like. Below is a partial list of some common sites used in the UK. You can find a larger list here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites

Facebook	LinkedIn	Pinterest	Flickr
Twitter	Tumblr	MySpace	WordPress
Google+	Instagram	YouTube	Blogger

Notes:

You can chose to use a paper diary (provided by me) or to submit your diary electronically via email at the end of the exercise.

Please anonymise information wherever possible. Examples might be to number friends (Friend 1, Friend 2, Friend 3) or to use initials (FR, DJ, LT).

If there are any other thoughts on how you build your own reputation or assess the reputations of others using online information that you would like to write about, please feel free to share those, too.

Don't worry about grammar, spelling, or handwriting.

You and your diary entries will remain anonymous.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your time keeping the diary. Email communications are preferred. Please note that I do not take phone calls before 8 am or after 8 pm and that I rarely text. Email and phone number redacted

Further information is available on your participant information form.

Thank you for your participation.

Frances Ryan

Appendix E: Sample diary transcript

Rachel: Boomers

Day 1: 16 December 2015

Friend1 retweeted an article about Siberian city wanting to elect cat for mayor – keen to maintain his reputation as an ironic commentator.

Friend2 promoting own work (TV programme this afternoon) on Twitter in humorous way, better than shoving the prestige down people's throats.

Friend3 with another shot of what she's wearing – bright pink stockings – on Instagram. She's trying to make herself out to be sexy and progressive, but actually it just comes across as a bit needy, especially because the shots aren't always flattering. (My view may be coloured by the fact I avoid showing photos of myself!)

Friend4 talking about someone else in the British Library, but there may be a subtext there of look, I'm still working even though term has ended!

Day 2: 17 December 2015

Friend5 suggesting we talk to her about her birthday now rather than when she's completely drunk later, reinforcing the impression she likes to give online of being a ladette – in real life she's actually much quieter and most of the drunken behaviour's an act.

Friend3 boasting about a posh night out in London, again maintaining the persona – in real life she's very lonely and her lavish spending is overcompensating for that (I'm sounding bitchy, I get on with her very well!).

I do the same, I guess – today's been a depressing day for a couple of reasons, but I avoid saying anything much about it on social media, because I don't want to worry my daughters (who live in [another country]) or my mother (who reads my Twitter feed), but also because I like to keep my Twitter use a bit lighter, presenting a positive view of my work and myself – witty retweets and (hopefully) ironic comments, as well as sharing what others are doing, rather than overloading it with personal issues. That may be a reflection of age, as well – I avoid Facebook because

Page 1 of 3 Rachel Boomers

Appendix F: Sample interview transcript

Interviewer: Can you talk to me about your own online activities as they pertain to your own reputation?

Karen: Yeah I guess I have three different I suppose you know identities online. One is to work and manage through my job which is campaigning Facebook accounts so that's separate and I haven't really recorded that in the diary because I'm not named as a person but of course I think carefully about the things that we put on there. But then also I'm a light user I suppose of LinkedIn and then I do use Facebook although I realised doing this diary that actually I'm one of these people who just watch what other people do on Facebook more or less and I really think about my reputation and the same on LinkedIn and others and I found that I'm quite dismissive of most things that people put on Facebook. So yeah I check it every day but it's rare that I interact very much, I might 'like' one or two things, like maybe articles and things that I find interesting. But I don't have big conversations and most of the things actually don't interest me and then I just end up thinking 'Why am I spending my time doing this?' Does that answer your question?

Interviewer: It does yes. And it brings me to another one. You were saying that you find yourself being quite dismissive. Is that dismissive toward the information itself or is that dismissive as being an evaluation of the person sharing the information?

Karen: Yeah I think it's actually the both. I didn't realise I think until sort of the diary prompted me to think about it, I think I am. I think it's a thing with Facebook that you don't think about really your interaction or maybe how you assess or are take in the information and what kind of opinions you're forming about people posting, it's just really interesting. Yes I do, there are a few examples you know people always post things every day mainly about cats or something and I just think 'Why am I looking at this? And what kind of person does have something better to do?' I would probably describe, it's terrible isn't it? I think maybe slightly differently, even I know somebody is a really intelligent person, I just think 'There's not something quite right here' if you spend all your day posting pictures of cats on your Facebook account'. You know? But the same person could put some really interesting kind of political articles and stuff but I just that that it's odd, I just find it really odd. And then I get annoyed with myself when I'm even glancing at these things.

Interviewer: So you touched a little bit back there and you talked about how you evaluate other people based on the online information they share.

Karen: Right I think it's mostly subconscious actually like you said. But you do clearly you do if you see someone voicing really personal information that's actually really maybe sensitive to them. You know things like they're going through a difficult year or you know that they've maybe had some serious problems or mental health problems, going through a divorce or whatever. I guess it's a form of getting some recognition and support but actually I just think it's a wrong thing to do and I do judge I realise. And it kind of makes me not want to interact with that person. And equally if someone just posts things that just seems sort of banal all the time, sometimes what I do is I unfollow people because I just can't deal with the cat photos or whatever. And yeah so I think I do judge but I think it's kind of subconscious, I think you're not necessarily thinking about it but it does effect somehow your relationship is you like with that person online that you might stop it or you just think 'Oh here we go' and just scroll down.

Page 1 of 10 Karen Gen X

Appendix G: Interview grid

Thinking about the focus of this research, what can you tell me about your own online activities as they related to reputation management?

Again, thinking about the focus of this research, what can you tell me about other people's social media use and how you evaluate their reputations?

Can you expand on that?	Can you share any examples?	Can you tell me anything else?	Why do you think that is?

Sharing	**Connecting**	**Names/privacy**	**Blurring**	**Evaluating**	**Searching**	**Interactions**	**Additional**
What to share / guiding principles	Who to connect with	Thoughts on pseudonyms or anonymous accounts	How much separation?	How? General habits / guiding principles	Searching for self or others online	What to re-tweet or share	Offending others
Difference in platforms	Difference in platforms	Thoughts on personal brands?	Online / offline	Determining accuracy / quality	How often	Tagging or mentioning others?	
Based on connections	Based on *their* connections	Your use of them	Private / professional	Decisions of what / who to trust	Why do you search?	Liking or favouriting	
Personal branding	Private v professional	For privacy / just because	Intentional blurring or separation?	Role of their connections to their reputation	Surprised by results (non-results)	Cross-linking to other materials	
NOT sharing	How/why do you connect?	Blurring between pseudonyms and real name	Guiding principles for keeping things separate or allowing blur?	Connections' behaviours	Actions to change results? (Delete, add, privacy settings)	Commenting on posts (privacy, who they are)	
Retweeting / sharing / liking	Brands / businesses / hobbies	Tie-in with personal brands	Thoughts on those who over-blur or keep separate?	Business / pages / hobbies they "like"	Someone not online?	Intentional actions/non-actions because of own reputation?	
Regrets	Unfriend? Unfollow? Block? Hide?			Online / offline knowledge	Platforms used? Avoided?		
Deleted / changed privacy / edited				Impact of accuracy / quality			
Intentional actions/non-actions for reputation?				Images vs text			
Things for ego-boost?				Hypocrisy			
				Frequency of posts			
				Platform use?			

Appendix H: Participant information and informed consent forms

Participant information sheet (informed consent part I)

This research is concerned with the role of online information in the creation, building, and assessment of personal reputations. It considers the means by which people create, build, and assess the personal reputations of others from the online evidence available to them, and how people manage their own personal reputations through their use of online information. (The term "personal reputation" in this context refers to the reputation of private individuals rather than corporate identity and brand).

The research considers:

(1) How people evaluate the personal reputations of others

(2) How people create and build their own personal reputations

This portion of the study includes diary-keeping exercise and interviews. Participants will be asked to maintain a diary on their social media use over the course of one week. Diaries can be hand-written or electronic. Participants will then participate in semi-structured interviews estimated to take one hour. Interviews will be face-to-face or can be conducted via Skype.

Things to note:

- Participation is voluntary and participants can withdraw at any time.
- All data will be anonymous and participation is confidential.
- Data will be encrypted and stored on the Edinburgh Napier University computer system with paper forms, documentation, and diaries stored in a locked cabinet, to be destroyed in accordance with university policy.
- A self-assessment form for ethical considerations has been completed for this project.
- Results of the study may be published or otherwise made publically available, however no person will be named.

Informed Consent Form (informed consent part II)

Project title: The role of online information in reputation management

Edinburgh Napier University requires that all persons who participate in research studies give their written consent to do so. Please read the following and sign it if you agree with what it says.

1. I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in this research to be conducted by Frances Ryan, who is a postgraduate student in the Edinburgh Napier School of Computing.

2. I have been informed of the broad goal of this research study. I have been told what is expected of me and that the study should take no longer than one week to complete the diary-keeping portion and approximately one hour for an interview.

3. I have been told that my responses will be anonymised. My name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in any report subsequently produced by the researcher. Further I have been told that any contacts I mention by name will be anonymised and not otherwise identified.

4. I also understand that if at any time during the diary-keeping or subsequent interview I feel unable or unwilling to continue, I am free to leave. That is, my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from it at any time without negative consequences. However, after data has been anonymised or after publication of results, it will not be possible for my data to be removed as it would be untraceable at this point.

5. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

6. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the diary-keeping or subsequent interview and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

7. I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study. My signature is not a waiver of any legal rights. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to keep a copy of this consent form for my records.

_____________________________ _____________________

Participant's Signature Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the respondent has consented to participate. Furthermore, I will retain one copy of the informed consent form for my records.

_____________________________ _____________________

Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix I: List of codes

Acknowledge errors, mistakes, wrong-doings	Deleting
Age differences	Different aspects of persona/identity
Aggressive	Editing or correcting a post
Alcohol	Ego
Algorithms	Embarrassing
Alignment, connection with others	Enjoyable
Always connected	Envious, jealous
Animals	Evaluations
Avoid Conflict	*Negative*
Avoid Misunderstandings	*Neutral*
Avoid upset or offense	*Positive*
Being dramatic, extreme, provocative	Family
Benefit of the doubt	Food
Blur - online-offline	Frequency
Blur - private-professional	Frustrating
Boring	Funny
Bragging	General thoughts
Brand	Genuine
Carefully thought out	Holidays, going out
Change of evaluation	Humble brag
Changes to own behaviour	Hypocrisy
Chatterboxing, twatching	Information overload, too much information
Check-in	Information sharing
Children	Inappropriate
Cliché, trite, obvious	Insights into Others
Click-bait	Inspirational, encouraging, motivational
Complains, negativity, moans	Instant reaction or emotional response
Confidence	Intentional Rep
Conflicting views or values	Interactions
Connections	*Acknowledgement of post by other*
Awkward to unfriend, unfollow	*Commenting*
Block	*Interaction desired*
Friending, following	*Like as a bookmark*
Friends-of-friends	*Like to acknowledge content*
Mute, hide	*Like to end or acknowledge conversation*
Purge	*Like to show others you saw or liked post*
Un-friend, un-follow	*Like, favourite*
Won't connect	*Won't comment*
Won't un-friend	*Won't interact*
Consciously	*Won't like, favourite*
Content, not people	Interesting
Context	Irritating
Contrary behaviours or platform use to own	Judgemental
Control over information	Keeping in touch
Courting attention	Knowledgeable
Cross-posting	LinkedIn as CV

Lurking	Re-share, re-tweet
Meaningful, important	Same name, different person
More than one identity or persona	Searching
More than one reputation	Self
Naming Conventions	Self-censorship
Needy	Selfies
No boundaries	Self-promotion
No longer relevant	Separate accounts
Not consciously	Sexist
Not interested	Sharing
Not my place, business	Sharing casual, random thoughts
Not online	Sharing everyday life stuff
Obligation, politeness	Sharing with select people
Off-topic	Show support, encouragement, excitement
Offends people	Similar behaviours or platform use to own
Offline Knowledge	Similar views, opinions, beliefs
Online and offline are DIFFERENT	Skewed view, incomplete information
Online and offline are SAME	Spelling, grammar, punctuation
Online and offline behaviours are different	Stalker
Online is wrong place	Suspicious, wary
Others	Tagging
Out of Character	Tells a story
Passive actions or non-actions	Thought provoking, conversation starters
Permanent, forever, can't really delete	Time constraints
Personal sharing	Tone
Personal views	Torn, in two minds, indecisive
Photos	Tribe, tribalism
Platform Use	Trolling
Policies and rules	Trust
Politics	Unaware
Privacy settings	Uncomfortable
Profanity	Unconcerned
Professional rep	Unexpected search results
Profile picture	Unnecessary
Quality, accuracy	Un-tagging
Quick evaluations	Use of hashtags
Racist	Vague-booking
Raise awareness	Valuable, important to me
Rarely post	Violence
Regrets	Won't share
Religion	Won't tag
Reputation builds over time	

Appendix J: Example of manual review of NVivo reports

Below is an example of a page from an NVivo report that was reviewed manually in relation to RQ3 and the evaluations of others. The report showed the most-used codes related to evaluations and insights. There were two rules for the query used to generate this report: (1) identify all data coded with *both* "evaluations" *and* "insights into others" and (2) identify which of those data were coded at *either* "negative" *or* "positive".

In the left-hand column, diary extracts from three participants are shown. The coding for this data is shown on the right. The codes are arranged by coding density with the most-used codes on the left side running vertically.

This report helped to highlight the ways in which "everyday life" information sharing practices led to generally positive reputational evaluations. From this, additional queries and reports were generated to further analyse how sharing everyday life information contributed to reputational evaluations.

7 = NO
25 total
= 18

RQ3 - evals. based on everyday life sharing
+ insights into others

Name: Coding Query - Results Preview

D1 <Internals\\Diaries\\Amanda> - § 2 references coded [6.26% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.25% Coverage

Friend TD shared religious meme – surprised as don't remember her having done that before, didn't consider her religious. I don't share those views, so feel a bit differently towards her. A mixture of surprise (that I thought I knew her but maybe didn't), and a bit 'cheated' maybe?!

Reference 2 - 3.01% Coverage

Friend AS posted a photo of the amazing chocolate cake she made for her son's birthday. Looks fabulous. I really admire her creations. I wouldn't have known she could make such things without Facebook. She had made quite a few and I think she is really talented.

D2 <Internals\\Diaries\\Fiona> - § 2 references coded [3.75% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.20% Coverage

Amused by SLY's post re a series of minor accidents – nothing serious but three in a row. As we worked together very closely on an improvised play, I feel I know her really well and it's like she's talking directly through her posts as like me, she tends to write as she speaks. I love that when I can hear the person in their post.

Reference 2 - 1.55% Coverage

NM posted photos of two of her boys at a local Christmas Fair. One of them is our god-son – they both look so cute and happy to see the Christmas lights – it's a joy to see their wee faces! That's what this silly season is all about.

D3 <Internals\\Diaries\\Jacqueline> - § 1 reference coded [4.70% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 4.70% Coverage

DH posted about a cycle ride today, one of many such posts recently. My first thought? Where does she get so much time off??? Then I remember that she's a shift worker so what she gains on sunny weekdays, I gain at the weekends! So that made me think about how I perceive others from their posts. On that basis RR never works (she does), BW always works

1A

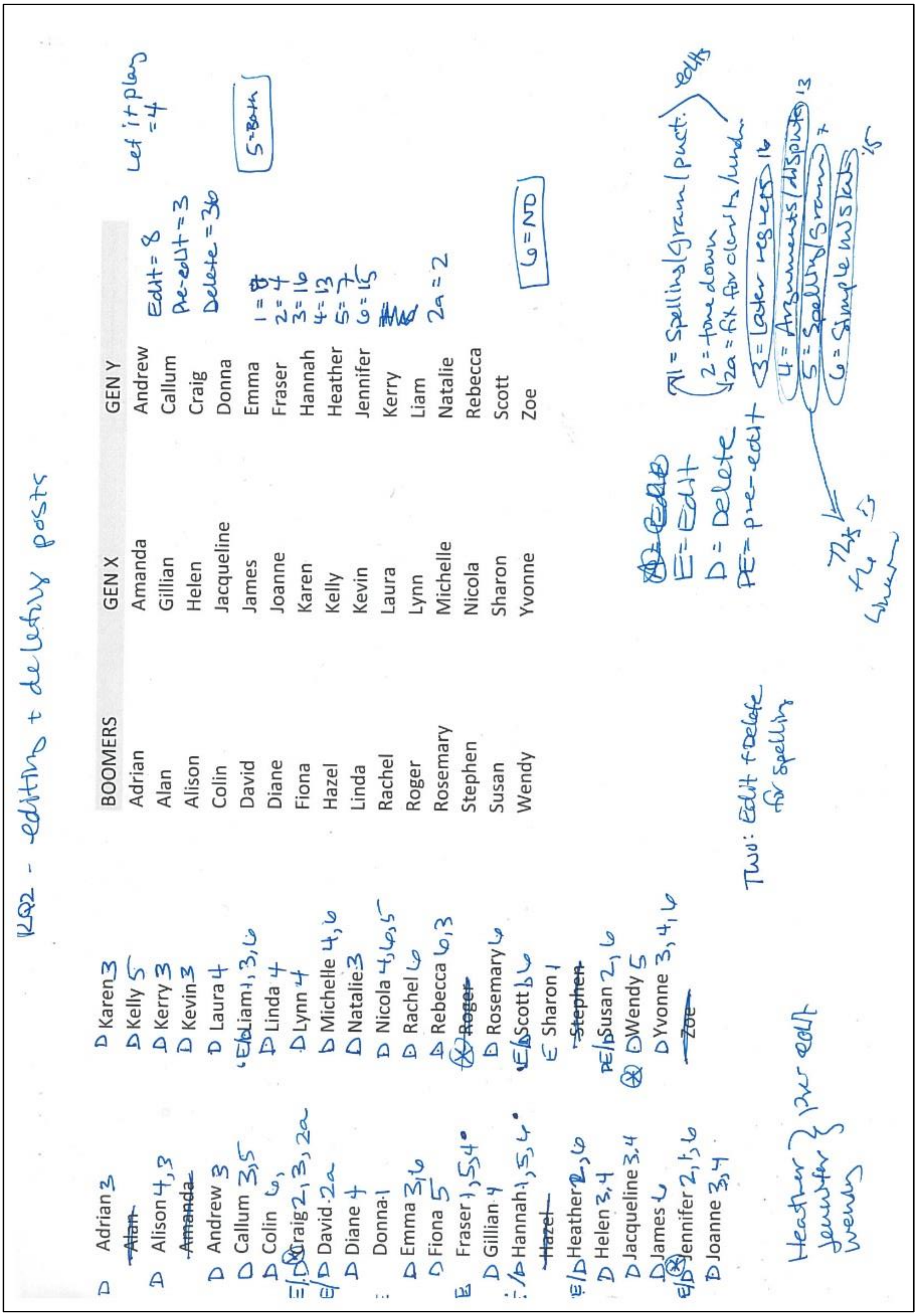
1 / 14

Appendix K: Example of how multiple reports were reviewed using worksheets

Below is an example of a worksheet with lists of participants' names for manually reviewing data from several NVivo reports. This worksheet is related to RQ2 and information censorship through deleting or editing content after it had been shared. In this example, all reports related to deleting and editing content were reviewed to determine which information practices participants undertook and their motivations for those practices.

A small hand-written table is found in the bottom-right corner of the worksheet. The information practices are labelled as "E" for edit, "D" for delete, and "PE" for pre-edit (for example, drafting information in a different medium before sharing it on social media). The motivations for these practices are listed to the right using numbers 1-6.

As the reports were reviewed, the practices and motivations were noted next to a participant's name. For example, Alison is noted with a "D" and the numbers 3 and 4 as she discussed deleting content because she later regretted sharing it or because it caused arguments or disputes.



RQ2 - editing + deleting posts

D Adrian 3
~~Alan~~
D Alison 4,3
~~Amanda~~
D Andrew 3
D Callum 3,5
D Colin 6,
E/D Craig 2, 3, 2a
E/D David 2a
D Diane 4
Donna 1
D Emma 3,6
D Fiona 5
E Fraser 1,5,4
D Gillian 4
E/D Hannah 1,5,4
~~Hazel~~
E/D Heather 2,6
D Helen 3,4
D Jacqueline 3,4
D James 6
E/D Jennifer 2,1,6
D Joanne 3,4

D Karen 3
D Kelly 5
D Kerry 3
D Kevin 3
D Laura 4
E/D Liam 1,3,6
D Linda 4
D Lynn 4
D Michelle 4,6
D Natalie 3
D Nicola 4,6,5
D Rachel 6
D Rebecca 6,3
~~Roger~~
D Rosemary 6
E/D Scott 1,6
E Sharon 1
~~Stephen~~
PE/D Susan 2,6
D Wendy 5
D Yvonne 3,4,6
~~Zoe~~

BOOMERS	GEN X	GEN Y
Adrian	Amanda	Andrew
Alan	Gillian	Callum
Alison	Helen	Craig
Colin	Jacqueline	Donna
David	James	Emma
Diane	Joanne	Fraser
Fiona	Karen	Hannah
Hazel	Kelly	Heather
Linda	Kevin	Jennifer
Rachel	Laura	Kerry
Roger	Lynn	Liam
Rosemary	Michelle	Natalie
Stephen	Nicola	Rebecca
Susan	Sharon	Scott
Wendy	Yvonne	Zoe

Edit = 8
Pre-edit = 3
Delete = 36

Let it play = 4

5 = Both

1 = 8
2 = 4
3 = 16
4 = 13
5 = 7
6 = 15
2a = 2

6 = ND

Two: Edit + Delete for spelling

Heather, Jennifer, Wendy } pre edit

E = Edit
D = Delete
PE = pre-edit

1 = Spelling/gram/punct. } edits
2 = tone down
2a = fix for clarity/understanding
3 = later regrets 16
4 = Arguments/disputes 13
5 = Spelling/gram 7
6 = Simple mistakes 15

73%