UNDERSTANDING THE PROFESSIONALLY RISKY BEHAVIOUR OF YOUNG ADULTS IN USING SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media play an increasingly important role in people's professional as well as personal lives, providing the means for seeking employment, consolidating social relationships with colleagues, and building professional reputation. However, in doing so, people submit their digital presence to the scrutiny and judgment of both current and prospective employers. This poses risks to professional reputation, and particularly for young adults who have been found to engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media, despite appearing aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. A mixed methods approach was adopted across five empirical studies to examine potential factors influencing this behaviour, and subsequently, how reputational risk may be mitigated in the use of social media amongst young adults. The first two studies, a document analysis of 30 organisational social media policies and a thematic analysis of 14 semi-structured interviews with university employees, emphasised the need for employees to closely self-regulate both the content of their posts and their online of connections with others. Expressions of individuality and personal views on social media were identified as representing both threats and opportunities for professional reputation, emphasising the need for vigilance and careful consideration of professional consequences, even within restricted online spaces. The third study examined whether individual differences in personality traits associated with “professionally appropriate” online behaviour predicted the extent to which 210 Sixth Form College and undergraduate students considered the professional consequences of their social media use. No significant effect of personality was found, although students transitioning into their final year of study reported significantly greater consideration than students at other stages of study. Examining whether increased perceptions of professional audience may have been a factor, the fourth study surveyed 257 final-year undergraduates and found that when employer surveillance on Facebook was judged by young adults to be psychologically closer to immediate experience, perceptions of profession risk in

relation to controversial or anti-social content upon the site were greater. In contrast, this was not the case for content depicting poor spelling or grammar, where typically low risk perceptions suggested a potential "blind spot" in risk awareness. The fifth study involved 20 semi-structured interviews with graduate trainees and interns, finding that advice from parents and university careers services was particularly influential in increasing perceptions of professional risk whilst applying for jobs, and connecting with other professionals online became a salient factor following organisational entry. The findings of this thesis demonstrated limited support for either a lack of digital reputation management skill or dispositions towards particular personality traits as factors influencing the professionally risky online behaviour of young adults. In contrast, the findings indicated a role for the psychological distance with which young adults construed professional audience online, and the aforementioned gap in risk awareness. These findings imply that interventions should focus primarily on building awareness of professional risk associated with poor spelling and grammar, whilst focusing more upon ways to induce psychological proximity of professional audience for addressing behaviours where the professional risks are already understood. In doing so, however, it is concluded that the shorter-term benefits of helping young adults to maintain their employability must be balanced against the longer-term consequences of normalising the chronic self-censorship of individuality amongst members of this cohort.

O me! O life! of the questions of these recurring,
Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish,
Of myself forever reproaching myself, (for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?)
Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the object mean, of the struggles ever renew'd,
Of the poor results of all, of all the plodding and sordid crowds I see around me,
Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me intertwined,
The question, O me! so sad, recurring – What good amid these, O me, O life?
Answer.
That you are here-that life exists and identity,
That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

O Me! O Life! (Walt Whitman, 1892)

For James (1984 – 2007),

and our design for life.

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1

INTRODUCTION

> *"I am a teenager, I am a young person. Everyone - no matter whether you are 13, 30, or 53 - at one point you are going to make a mistake. You are going to say something you either regret, say something stupid, or you are going to have maybe an immature moment. It's going to happen, it happens to everybody. I am a teenager; I'm not going to be perfect. No teenager is. But in a way, that helps to show young people I am like them. I do make mistakes, I do do stupid things."*
>
> Paris Brown (BBC, 2013a)

In early 2013, Paris Brown was a relatively unremarkable British 17-year-old, working as an office junior at her local Borough Council in Kent. Considered to be a committed, confident, and energetic worker by her colleagues (Myers, 2013), Paris had been encouraged to apply for the newly formed post of Youth Police Crime Commissioner by her superiors; a position that would involve helping Kent Police to connect and communicate with young people in the local area. As an ardent Twitter user, Paris was seemingly well placed to utilise social media within the position, and indeed was successfully recruited from a pool of over 150 applicants whereupon one of her first tasks was to create Twitter accounts for both the role ("@YouthPCC") and her new professional identity ("@parisbrownn").

Less than one week into her new position, however, a Daily Mail article entitled "*Is this foul-mouthed, self-obsessed Twitter teen really the future of British policing? Youth crime tsar's sex and drug rants"* (Myers, 2013) dissected the publicly accessible archive of over four thousand tweets shared from between the ages of 14 to 16-years-old on Paris's existing Twitter account ("@vilubelle").

In particular, the article highlighted tweets with apparent references to drug taking, alcohol consumption, sex, violence, and the use of derogatory language. Given the high profile nature of the Youth Police Crime Commissioner role, Paris soon faced intense media scrutiny of her digital presence across social media, the threat of a potential criminal investigation, and significant public pressure to be removed from her post. After just six days into her job, Paris Brown resigned (BBC, 2013b).

Though the level of public interest in the Paris Brown case marked it as a relatively unique illustration of the professional risks seemingly facing young adults through their use of social media, it appears to be by no means an isolated instance. In 2011, a 24-year-old High School teacher in the United States was reportedly forced to resign due to a Facebook photo posted two years previously, depicting her posing with a pint of beer whilst on vacation (Sullivan, 2011). Similarly, a UK-based 16-year-old was terminated from her job after sharing a Facebook status update describing her office job as "boring", despite avoiding any mention of her employer by name (BBC, 2009). Numerous other cases have illustrated situations in which posts led to being discounted by prospective employers, such as one 22-year-old whose tweet in response to a job offer from Cisco publicly pondered "*the utility of a fatty paycheck against the daily commute to San Jose and hating the work*." Following the discovery of the tweet by a current employee, the individual's application was reportedly taken no further (McGlaun, 2009).

Together, these instances illustrate how the use, or perhaps misuse of social media can have profoundly damaging consequences for the employability of young adults in their late teens and early twenties. As a form of communication technology characterised by personal profiles, user-generated content, and networked connections (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison & boyd, 2013)[1], social media are a global phenomenon that show little sign of abating,

[1] For clarification, this thesis refers to danah boyd in her preferred lower-case form.

with Twitter (2015) and Facebook (2015) citing figures of 316 million and 1.49 billion monthly active users worldwide for the second quarter of 2015, respectively. Young, or "emerging" (Arnett, 2000) adults in their late teens and early twenties have played a particularly pivotal role in the growth and mainstream adoption of the technology in contemporary society (boyd & Ellison, 2007), with recent reports indicating that approximately nine out of every ten 16 to 24-year-olds in both the United Kingdom and United States report using social network sites (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2014).

However, the pervasiveness of social media amongst young adults has provided entrepreneurs and technologically astute organisations with both a lucrative source of revenue and unprecedented access to prospective employees. Indeed, recent figures suggest that more than 70 percent of organisations operating across the world report actively using social media for business purposes (KPMG, 2011), with up to 90 percent of employers integrating the technology into their recruitment and selection processes (Jobvite, 2013, 2014b). As noted by Kirkpatrick (2010, p. 15) in his discussion of Facebook, "*This is no longer just a plaything for college students*", and yet, as illustrated by the aforementioned cases, some young adults approaching the professional transition of organisational entry seemingly continue to interact with social media in ways that may pose a risk to their professional reputation.

1.1 Problem Definition and Objectives

According to Madden and Smith (2010, p. 2), "*Reputation management has now become a defining feature of online life for many internet users, especially the young*". The current thesis is concerned with understanding the factors that lead young adults to behave in professionally risky ways upon social media, despite seemingly being aware of the potentially damaging consequences for their employability. In particular, the thesis examines how young adults perceive and manage the professional risks associated with using social media platforms

where online audiences consist not only of friends and family, but also prospective employers and colleagues. Thus, the notion of risk within this specific context refers to the professional consequences that can result from self-presentation upon social media, and in particular, focuses on actions that seem likely to influence negative judgments by professional others. As such, the prevailing interpretation of risk in the thesis is broadly in line with that of Giddens (1999, p. 3), who notes,

> *"Essentially, 'risk' always has a negative connotation, since it refers to the chance of avoiding an unwanted outcome. But it can quite often be seen in a positive light, in terms of the taking of bold initiatives in the face of a problematic future."*

Nevertheless, the concept of professional risk on social media is one that is in a constant state of flux, shifting as the platforms themselves introduce, remove or otherwise modify design features that subsequently shape the appropriateness of particular user behaviours over time. Indeed, a key issue facing young adults using social media and yet to enter the workplace is that online self-presentations primarily intended for friends can nevertheless end up being judged within a professional context, sometimes years in the future. Contributing to this situation are the numerous ways in which public spaces differ in offline and online contexts, and in the case of the latter in particular, the potential for conflicting social norms and goals. For instance, boyd (2007, p. 126) identifies four essential properties of "networked publics" that distinguish them from their offline variant: first, the asynchronous, persistent nature of communication; second, the relative ease with which recorded expressions and identities of individuals can be searched for and discovered; third, the replicability challenge of distinguishing original expression from copies; and fourth, the invisibility of audiences and therefore, the ambiguity surrounding whom is observing behaviour at any given moment in time.

Later revised by boyd (2014, p. 11) and Mayer-Schönberger (2009) to represent the affordances of persistence, visibility, spreadability, and

searchability, each have contributed to the progressive erosion of boundaries that once demarcated personal and professional spheres of social life for individuals. For instance, the visibility and searchability of data upon social media has enabled almost two-fifths of employers to monitor the social media activity of their employees upon company-owned computers and mobile devices (SHRM, 2012); a figure that increases to almost three-fifths when reported by managers (KPMG, 2011). Additionally, organisations seeking to control the risk of reputational damage associated with their employees' unrestricted use of social media are increasingly implementing social media policies and guidelines for their workers (Boudreaux, 2011), with a third of employers in one survey reporting having disciplined employees for their violation of the stated terms (SHRM, 2012).

The integration of social media within recruitment screening processes, typically referred to as "social recruiting" (Doherty, 2010), has also become an increasingly common practice and poses a potentially significant professional risk to young adult users preparing to enter the workplace. Whilst the professional networking site LinkedIn appears to constitute a common aspect of contemporary applicant screening processes, ranging from half (Reppler, 2011) to over 90 percent (Jobvite, 2014b) of recruiters, a more contentious trend is indicated by the two-thirds of recruiters using the Facebook profiles of applicants as part of their screening processes (CareerBuilder, 2012; Jobvite, 2014b; Reppler, 2011). Defendants of social recruiting might argue that between one to two-thirds of recruiters report roughly equal prevalence of having hired as well as dismissed applicants on the basis of content found upon social media profiles (CareerBuilder, 2012; Reppler, 2011), but the practice is nevertheless potentially problematic in that its typically covert nature provides subjects with little opportunity to explain context associated with any identified content.

This point may be particularly salient for young adults who, like Paris Brown, are likely to have accrued sizable digital footprints upon social media, perhaps even dating back to early adolescence. Whilst the relatively recent

adoption of such social technologies by organisations has meant that the study of professional risk on social media is a fluid, emerging field, numerous studies have suggested that prospective employers have in recent years been especially inclined towards forming negative judgments of social media content suggesting illegal drug taking or excessive drinking, the criticism of former employers, that are of a sexual, discriminatory or profane nature, or convey spelling and grammatical errors (CareerBuilder, 2012; Cross-Tab, 2010; Jobvite, 2014b; Reppler, 2011). Given the propensity for adolescents and young adults to engage in a variety of risky behaviours (Reyna & Farley, 2006; Rolison, Hanoch, Wood, & Liu, 2013; Steinberg, 2007) and explore different identities as a fundamental aspect of their psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966), many may be at risk of damaging their career prospects by sharing content online that may seem appropriate in the moment amongst friends, but that is also likely to shape negative judgments formed by a professional audience.

It is important to note though that the surveillance of young adults on social media by current and prospective employers is not only legally and ethically contentious (Kluemper, Rosen, & Mossholder, 2012), but also a practice that has received little support in terms of the validity of its predictions for organisational outcomes such as job performance, turnover intentions, or actual turnover rates (Van Iddekinge, Lanivich, Roth, & Junco, 2013). Indeed, a core function of reputation, as a concept, has historically been to serve as a social proxy that provides others with a way in which to judge the behavioural consistency of an individual when presented with little or no previous experience of having interacted with them personally (Bromley, 1993; Craik, 2008; Emler, 1990). For many recruiters, behaviour observed upon social media may appear to provide valuable insights into the likely "fit" of a person within an organisation, but there are major issues posed by the lack of context when interpreting content displaced in relation to time and social situation.

Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of social recruiting continues to grow, in part due to its cost-effectiveness and reported improvement upon the quality

and quantity of candidates otherwise attracted through more traditional recruitment strategies (Jobvite, 2014b). Therefore, as a problem that is unlikely to dissipate in the near future, young adults must instead look towards actively managing the professional risk associated with their online presence, both prior to and following organisational entry. However, because of the continuously shifting character of social media platforms, the online behaviours they afford and the social norms that determine their respective appropriateness, both the concept of professional risk and its subsequent perception by young adults also change accordingly with time. For this reason, it is acknowledged that the current thesis examines a dynamic social phenomenon that is emerging and irrevocably tied to the social media technologies of the present, but that is open to transformation as these platforms develop in the future.

The related notions of temporality and change also play out in other important ways. For instance, the persistence of content upon social media means that young adults yet to make the college-to-work transition are faced with the task of considering how a professional audience might judge their online behaviour, sometimes many years into the future where the social norms and personal goals influencing interactions may have transformed considerably. The implications of this are noted by Mayer-Schönberger (2009, p. 111),

> *"If we have to imagine how somebody years – perhaps decades into the future – may interpret and weigh our words, we would be even more careful in formulating them".*

This thesis examines not only the extent to which young adults exercise caution by considering the professional consequences of their interactions with social media, but also the various factors that may influence it. Specifically, the empirical research studies presented in Chapters 4 to 8 focus on firstly, how the dynamic concept of professional risk upon social media is interpreted by organisations and employees in the present day, and secondly, why UK-based young adults approaching the college-to-work transition may differ in how they perceive and manage its expression. In particular, work from within the

disciplines of Social Psychology, Human-Computer Interaction, and Organisational Psychology is drawn upon to interpret online self-presentation and reputational risk. The subsequent research questions guiding the empirical research are now presented in the following section.

1.2 Research Objectives

A number of studies have indicated that young adults appear to be familiar with online strategies such as deleting unwanted comments made by others and removing their name from tagged photos (Cross-Tab, 2010; Madden et al., 2013; Madden & Smith, 2010), although their emphasis upon the importance of information control and privacy does not always appear to translate into effective privacy behaviours (Christofides, Muise, & Desmarais, 2009; Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009). Though still very much an emerging field of research, there is also some indication that university students seem to be aware of the likelihood that prospective employers will search for their social media presence (Root & McKay, 2014; Vicknair, Elkersh, Yancey, & Budden, 2010), yet nevertheless continue to engage in behaviours that could be considered as professionally inappropriate. Seeking to understand this apparent "posting paradox" (R. Miller, Parsons, & Lifer, 2010) is the core research objective of this thesis, with the following question guiding the research:

> **RO:** *Why do young adults approaching the college-to-work transition engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media, despite seemingly being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences?*

With a lack of methodologically rigorous research examining the emerging concept of professional risk within the context of social media, the first two empirical studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis seek to clarify the present day social norms underpinning the notion of "professionally inappropriate" behaviour online. In particular, Studies 1 and 2 examine the

perspectives of both organisations and current employees, respectively, in order to address the following research question:

- *How might professionally risky use of social media be defined in the present day?*

It is important to note, however, that in drawing upon the findings of Studies 1 and 2 to inform the concept of professional risk used in the subsequent Studies 3, 4, and 5 of this thesis, an assumption is made that these organisational interpretations of "professionally inappropriate" online behaviour will similarly apply to potential future employees who may find themselves the focus of social recruiting. The rationale for making this link is informed by the notion that employers typically strive to optimise person-organisation fit through the recruitment and selection process (e.g. Kristof, 1996), and as social media have become an increasingly prominent means of communication for organisations (e.g. KPMG, 2011; Wollan, Smith, & Zhou, 2011) the phase of organisational socialisation that typically follows organisational entry is now likely to involve employee adjustment to both offline and online norms of appropriate behaviour (e.g. Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). It is argued, therefore, that it is in the interest of organisations to ensure that prospective employees can demonstrate the ability, or at least the aspirations, to align with prevailing expectations of appropriate, professional online behaviour.

To understand why young adults appear to engage in the types of online behaviours identified as being professionally risky by employers and current employees, this thesis proposes a number of potential hypotheses that are primarily influenced by self-presentation and identity research within Social Psychology, HCI, and Organisational Psychology (see Chapter 2). Specifically, Studies 3, 4, and 5 address the extent to which professionally risky behaviour amongst young adults appears to be influenced by a lack of risk awareness, deficits in reputation management skills, dispositions towards personality traits associated with risky behaviour, and a lack of perceived online presence in relation to a professional audience. Following detailed discussion of the

empirical research findings in Chapter 9, the following research question is addressed:

- *How might young adults be assisted in effectively managing the expression of professionally risky behaviour when using social media?*

By attending to this question, Chapter 9 addresses a further objective of the thesis, which is to draw upon the empirical findings to suggest ways in which young adults can enhance their understanding of professional risk and digital reputation management strategies when using social media; thus mitigating the risk of their career prospects being damaged by their online behaviour.

1.3 Research Areas

The current thesis embraces a pragmatic perspective, using a mixed methods approach to address the principal research question of why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour on social media, despite seemingly being aware of the damaging reputational consequences. In doing so, the thesis draws upon research from the following areas:

- *Social Psychology* – The current thesis draws inspiration from social psychological research in a number of respects (see Chapter 2). Theoretically, the empirical studies are influenced particularly by the related concepts of self-presentation and both impression and reputation management, in addition to social identity, boundary management, and self-regulation. Methodologically, the empirical studies reflect the rich diversity of both quantitative and qualitative methods adopted throughout both psychological and sociological strands of social psychological research (Gecas, 1982; Stryker, 1977).

- *Organisational Behaviour* – The phase of organisational entry (Wanous, 1977) provides the specific context in which the principal research question of this thesis is examined, with young adults faced with making the transition from student to employee, and adjusting their online

behaviour accordingly. Methodologically, the use of the critical incident technique (CIT) in Study 5 (see Chapter 8) reflects its origins within organisational research (Flanagan, 1954).

- *Human-Computer Interaction (HCI)* – In studying the professionally risky behaviour of young adults upon social media, this thesis is concerned with a specific form of interaction between individual users and the social web. Indeed, as the Internet has become increasingly participative, the multidisciplinary field of social computing has emerged, combining Computer Science with a range of disciplines including Sociology, Psychology, Engineering, and Organisational Behaviour. As illustrated in Chapter 2, this thesis draws upon research examining concepts such as networked publics, context collapse, and privacy behaviours to understand how social media has transformed reputation management. Methodologically, a variant of the think-aloud protocol (TAP), used primarily within HCI research for usability testing, was adopted to evaluate the utility of free-to-use digital reputation management systems in Chapter 8.

- *Impression and Reputation Management* – Often used interchangeably with the term "self-presentation", impression management is the process by which "*individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them*" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). One of the most influential perspectives within social media research has been the dramaturgical interpretation presented by Goffman (1959), in which social interactions are posited as a series of strategic and interactive performances shaped by the context of the social environment and audiences with whom the actors are faced. The process of reputation management is related but distinct to impression management, in that rather than seeking to control the impressions of a particular audience at a given moment in time, it is concerned with influencing the collective opinion or judgment held by a

particular community or group beyond the immediate situation (Craik, 2008; Emler, 1990). This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of social media, given the persistent and visible nature of digital data.

- *Personality Psychology* – At the core of personality psychology is the goal of investigating individual differences, or the characteristics and traits through which people can differ from one another. In the context of the current thesis, particular attention is afforded to personality traits identified in the social computing literatures (see Chapter 2) and analysis of the first two empirical research studies (see Chapters 4 and 5) as being associated with professionally risky behaviour when using social media. Specifically, Study 3 (see Chapter 6) examines the respective roles of conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, self-monitoring, and impulsiveness in predicting the extent to which students consider the professional consequences of their interactions with social media.

- *Risk Perception* – Studies of risk perception examine how people think about and evaluate potentially hazardous activities, and typically seek to uncover the factors that influence such perceptions. Understanding of risk perception is informed by many academic disciplines (Slovic, 1987), though the contribution of psychological research is of most interest within the current thesis. In particular, the burgeoning area of research linking the construal-level theory of psychological distance (CLT: Liberman & Trope, 1998; Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007) with risk perception and prevention behaviour forms the basis of Studies 4 and 5 (see Chapters 7 and 8).

- *Psychological Distance* – The construal-level theory of psychological distance proposes that as individuals cannot directly experience objects or events that are not present, they instead come to construe them in terms of their psychological distance from directly experienced reality (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Following the findings of Study 3 in the thesis,

this essential premise is adopted as the theoretical basis for examining the relationship between perceptions of professional audience and professional risk upon social media.

1.4 Contributions

Though discussed in greater detail within Chapter 9, the following points summarise the key contributions of the thesis in seeking to understand and offer possible interventions in relation to the management of professionally risky behaviour amongst young adults using social media:

- *Theoretical* – A key contribution of this thesis is in identifying the psychological distance of professional audience as a factor explaining why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media, despite being aware of the professional consequences. In this regard, the empirical research extends CLT research to the context of social media, and in particular the study of online reputation management. This thesis also offers a theoretical contribution in terms of a conceptual framework of professional risk and reputation management strategies, grounded in the perspectives of organisations and current employees.

- *Methodological* – Though requiring further validation, this thesis developed a range of psychometrically robust and reliable scale-based measures that can be used in future research. Specifically, measures of self-regulatory interactions with social media were used in Study 3 (see Chapter 6) and found to predict variance in the extent to which students reported considering the professional consequences of their online interactions, controlling for individual differences in personality. Study 4 (see Chapter 7) contributed to the limited number of studies to have used a scale-based measure of psychological distance rather than manipulating it through experimental design (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Similarly, perceptions of professional risk were measured through the development

of vignettes based on real-life cases, such as those outlined at the outset of this chapter, rather than more abstract self-report measures used elsewhere (e.g. Root & McKay, 2014).

- *Ethical* – Social media research poses a number of significant ethical dilemmas with regards to the need for informed consent, the status of personhood through digital data, and the personal or public nature of online interactions (Henderson, Johnson, & Auld, 2013; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Due to the sensitivity of studying professionally risky behaviour, this thesis adopted a person-centred approach to social media ethics in its methodological approach. Despite claims that the era of "big data" justifies discarding the "why" of phenomena in favour of the "what" (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013), the findings of this thesis underscore the valuable insights into human behaviour that can be derived when acknowledging the privacy and intrinsic personal value of data to participants.

- *Educational* - The core findings of this thesis indicate both potential "blind spots" of professional risk awareness amongst young adults, and the importance of the psychological distance of professional audience to perceptions of risk and trust in privacy settings. As such, it would appear to be important for educational interventions to not only focus upon developing digital literacy with respect to knowledge and awareness of potentially damaging online behaviours, but also to frame the professional risks of using social media in more psychologically proximal terms in order to prime greater motivation to engage in preventative behaviours. In particular, the findings of this thesis indicate that such an approach may be especially beneficial in relation to behaviours that are already known to be risky amongst young adults. Furthermore, interventions must acknowledge the potentially beneficial consequences of engaging in risky behaviour online, and focus on helping young adults

to make informed judgments that are relative to the situation rather than producing inflexible guidelines of "do's and don'ts".

- *System Design* – Digital reputation management systems (DRMSs), such as Reppler and Persona, represent a relatively novel technological approach to helping young adults to identify and manage professionally risky content upon their social media profiles. However, the findings of this thesis indicated that they are not widely used and demonstrate a number of important limitations with respect to the reliability of the information they present users. With the self-regulation of social media use identified in the thesis as a consistently important strategy of managing professional risk online, future system designs should focus upon providing information about potentially damaging content *prior* to publication, possibly through the implementation of a "buffering", or broadcast delay feature.

1.5 Publications from the Thesis

Parts of this thesis have been accepted by peer-review for publication as a book chapter, journal article, and conference proceedings:

- An extended discussion of the section on person-centred social media research ethics in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4) is to be published in *Carter, C. J., Koene, A., Perez, E., Statache, R., Adolphs, S., O'Malley, C., Rodden, T., and McAuley, D. (2016). "Understanding Academic Attitudes Towards the Ethical Challenges Posed by Social Media Research", ACM SIGCAS Computers and Society, 45(3), p. 202 - 210.*

- The perceptions and management of professional risk upon social media amongst Higher Education employees presented in Chapter 5 has appeared in *Carter, C. J., Martin, L. and O'Malley, C. (2014). "Understanding the Social Media Ecologies of Employees Within Higher Education*

Institutions: A UK-Based Case Study". In M. Kent and T. Leaver (Eds) "An Education in Facebook?" p. 217 – 227. New York: Routledge.

- An alternative analysis of the findings outlined in Chapter 5 appeared in conference proceedings as *Carter, C. J., Martin, L. and O'Malley, C. (2012). "Social Media, the Organisation and Me: An Exploration of Identity Work by Employees in the Digital Age", British Academy of Management Annual Meeting, Cardiff, UK.*
- The survey-based scales developed to measure self-regulation of social media use and consideration of professional consequences upon social media in Chapter 6 were published in conference proceedings as *Carter, C. J., O'Malley, C. and Martin, L. (2013). "Developing a Scale to Measure Concern for Professional Reputation through Interaction with Social Media", DE2013: Digital Open Conference, Manchester, UK*.
- The types of critical incident discussed in Chapter 8 that led young adults to consider professional risk whilst using social media during organisational entry are to be published in conference proceedings as *Carter, C.J., Martin, L. and O'Malley, C. (2015). "Understanding Digital Reputation Management Amongst Young Adults Using Social Media During Organisational Entry", British Academy of Management Annual Meeting, Portsmouth, UK.*

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The current thesis is structured in four parts. Part I presents the background and related literature. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical foundations of the thesis, beginning with a review of social psychological literatures addressing the concept of the social self, and how individuals seek to control its expression through the processes of impression and reputation management. The chapter then reviews how the structural affordances of social media have challenged traditional notions of social identity and set the conditions for risk to professional reputation. The chapter then focuses specially upon the

professionally risky behaviour of young adults on social media, closing with an examination of the potential factors influencing its expression and the subsequent research questions posed throughout the thesis.

Part II provides details of the methodological approach adopted throughout the empirical research of this thesis. Chapter 3 outlines the rationale for focusing specifically upon young adults and adopting a pragmatic, mixed method approach. Details are provided in relation to the use of document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and online surveys. The chapter closes with a discussion of social media research ethics and the rationale for adhering to a person-centric approach of social media research.

Part III details the empirical research undertaken in the current thesis. The first two studies examine the concept of professional risk within the context of social media from the perspectives of both organisations and current employees. Specifically, Chapter 4 presents the findings of Study 1: a document analysis of organisational social media policies for employees, with employers identified as influential consumer brands and spanning a range of sectors. Chapter 5 outlines the findings of Study 2, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with academic and administrative professionals using social media and working within a single university. In particular, themes are outlined in relation to employee perceptions and management of professional risk whilst using social media to support professional activity.

The remaining empirical studies investigate potential factors influencing the professionally risky behaviour of young adults on social media. Chapter 6 presents the findings of Study 3, which used online surveys with college and university students to examine the respective roles of individual differences in personality, self-regulation of social media use, and proximity to graduation in predicting the consideration of professional consequences upon Facebook and Twitter. Following from the core findings of this study, Chapter 7 discusses the findings of Study 4: an online survey of final-year, job seeking undergraduate students that examined the relationship between psychological distance of

employer surveillance on Facebook and perceptions of professional risk upon the site.

Chapter 8 outlines the findings of Study 5, which combined semi-structured interviews with the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and Think-Aloud Protocol (TAP) to examine the types of incident that led recent graduates and year-in-industry interns to consider professional risk whilst using social media prior to, during, and after the college-to-work transition. The study also analyses the types of response to each incident, and evaluates the utility of two digital reputation management systems (DRMSs), Reppler and Persona, designed to assist users with the identification of professionally risky content.

Part IV reflects upon the findings and implications of the empirical research studies presented in this thesis. Chapter 9 discusses the empirical studies as a coherent body of research, relating them to one another and to the overarching research objective. The key theoretical and methodological contributions of the thesis are outlined, and implications discussed in relation to the design of education interventions and digital reputation management systems to help young adults mitigate risks to professional reputation. The chapter closes with a discussion of limitations and future work to be conducted. Chapter 10 outlines the conclusions of this thesis.

Part I

LITERATURE REVIEW

2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter helps to develop an understanding of the impact social media has on the employability of young adults approaching the college-to-work transition. Drawing on literatures from a range of interdisciplinary domains, the chapter outlines the conceptual importance of social identity to understanding how individuals seek to control judgments formed of their identity by others, and why the various affordances of social media design present a risk to the professional reputations of young adults. Specifically, the persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability of online social interactions enable both prospective and current employers to form professional judgments of young adults, for whom the technology represents a core means of communication. The chapter follows with an outline of the possible factors influencing the professionally risky behaviour of members within this cohort, and concludes by highlighting how the empirical studies presented in this thesis contribute to the gaps identified in the extant literatures.

2.2 A Social Psychological Perspective of Identity

The concept of identity is at the core of understanding why people choose to present themselves in particular ways. As a heavily theorised concept spanning numerous academic disciplines, significant debate surrounds the definition of identity, and the closely related notion of the self (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Côté & Levine, 2002; Haslam, Jetten, Haslam, Pugliese, & Tonks, 2011). With an exhaustive review of the multidisciplinary interpretations of identity beyond the scope of this thesis, the following sections focus specifically on key elements of

the extensive theoretical and empirical work examining the concept within the social psychological and sociological literatures. Nevertheless, disentangling the relative contributions of these closely interwoven disciplines remains a complex endeavour in itself.

As outlined by Stryker (1977) and Gecas (1982), at least two social psychologies exist: first, a "*psychological social psychology … defined by its focus on psychological processes of individuals* [where] *the task is to understand the impact of social stimuli on individuals*", and second, a "*sociological social psychology … defined by the reciprocity of society and individual* [where] *the fundamental task is the explanation of social interaction*" (Stryker, 1977, p. 145). For clarity, this thesis draws primarily from the former perspective to examine the professionally risky behaviour of young adults as an outcome of the interaction between psychological processes and the specific social context of using social media prior to and following the college-to-work transition. As such, the current chapter focuses primarily upon the rich body of psychological literature detailing the social basis of identity.

Additionally, Baumeister (1999) proposes that psychological research on identity can be categorised into three major areas: "reflexive consciousness" and the study of self-knowledge and awareness; "executive function" and the study of how individuals exert their control and regulate identity; and finally, "interpersonal being" and the study of the self in relation to social others. The forthcoming sections of the review address the latter two areas in particular, detailing how individuals actively modify their behaviour in relation to goals and internalised standards, in addition to interpersonal relationships and the norms of particular social contexts.

2.2.1 Executive Functioning and Self-Regulation

The essential question of "Who am I?" that underpins the concept of identity has been a concern for philosophers and psychologists alike for centuries (Simon & Trotschel, 2007). Though once prominent, the Kantian interpretation of the self as a distinct, stable, and independently knowable entity at the core of one's

existence, otherwise referred to as the "pearl view" (Strawson, 1997), has largely been supplanted by the Humean rejection of a stable and distinct inner core in favour of different identities constructed from "bundles" of psychological experiences, including thoughts, emotions, and motives (e.g. Baggini, 2011). Indeed, modern theorists have proposed that the sense of unity with which individuals perceive their personal identity is not evidence of an independent "I", but rather an "illusion" (Hood, 2012) or "ego trick" (Baggini, 2011) of the human psyche.

From this perspective, identity is viewed as a psychologically unified reconstruction of experiences bound together over time by memory, which in turn provides the element of self-continuity required for the illusion to function (Klein & Nichols, 2012). Indeed, the relationship between self and memory was identified by John Locke (1690 / 2004), who viewed personal identities as being informed by whatever past actions and experiences could be recalled by the individual (Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003), and thus extended the Cartesian "*I think, therefore I am*" notion of the self beyond the bounds of immediate consciousness. Reid (1785 / 1969) similarly acknowledged the role of memory in confirming past existence, concluding, "*Identity in general, I take to be a relation between a thing which is known to exist at one time, and a thing which is known to have existed at another time*" (p.316).

Indeed, the self-referential quality of episodic memory and the "autobiographical knowledge base" proposed by Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) reveal the important role of the self-memory system in how individuals construct personal narratives and maintain a sense of self-continuity over time (Klein, 2001). This point is reflected in Giddens' (1991, p. 5) proposition of identity as an on-going biographical narrative, or "*reflexive project of the self*", and the distinct post-modernist interpretations represented by Lifton's (1993) fluid and pluralistic notion of the "protean self", and Gergen's (1991) fragmented and highly dissociated "saturated self", where "*over time, people change, new selves replace or improve upon the old*" (McAdams, 1997, p. 48).

At the core of these dynamic and reflexive interpretations of identity is the notion of "executive functioning" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003), in which the self is conceived "*not a passive, indifferent, or unresponsive entity*", but rather as "*active, involved, and responsive, intentionally engaging in volitional processes to change, alter or modify itself*" (p. 197). Specifically, executive functioning is proposed to involve a process through which the self assesses situations, filters out information of little relevance, and then selects a particular course of action from the options available (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003). In this respect, executive functioning appears to be fundamental to understanding the social basis of the self, as it underscores the capacity for individuals to be able to adapt to different social contexts.

However, in order to orientate these actions, it is proposed that goals are identified by individuals with respect to what they feel they want, or need, to achieve or avoid (Carver & Scheier, 1990), with behaviour enacted and progressively monitored until such goals are attained. Baumeister and Vohs (2003) label this on-going practice of behavioural alteration and inhibition as "self-regulation", drawing upon Carver and Scheier's (1982) earlier test-operate-test-exit (TOTE) model where self-regulation is posited as a feedback system in which the individual compares their current self to a particular standard and seeks to bring their self into line with it, monitoring progress until the standard has eventually been achieved. At the core of this interpretation is the notion that behaviour is primarily driven by the motivation to reduce any discrepancies between perceived current states and identified standards (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Carver & Scheier, 1982).

Closely aligned with this perspective is Higgins' self-discrepancy theory (SDT: 1987), in which it is posited that people compare themselves to "self-guides" serving as internalised standards, and are primarily motivated to reduce perceived discrepancies. In particular, gaps between an individual's sense of "actual" self and their aspirational "ideal" self have been found to be associated with dejection-related emotions such as dissatisfaction or disappointment,

whilst discrepancies in relation to the externally influenced "ought" self appear to be related to agitation-related emotions, such as fear or restlessness (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999; E. T. Higgins, 1987; E. T. Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986). However, as argued by Baumeister and Vohs (2003), goal-oriented behaviour may not always be underpinned by discrepancy reduction.

For instance, in situations where an undesirable rather than desirable end-state is identified, behaviour may alternatively be guided by attempts to *increase* the perceived discrepancy between the self and the identified standard. Indeed, Carver and Scheier (1990) distinguished between an approach-based regulatory system focused on discrepancy-reduction, and an avoidance-based regulatory system concerned with discrepancy-amplification. Echoing the integral role of "standards" within Carver and Scheier's (1982) TOTE model, E.T. Higgins, Roney, Crowe, and Hymes (1994) also presented evidence to suggest that ideal self-regulation represents a positive outcome focus system responsible for nurturance-like needs and fulfilled through approach-based behaviour, whilst ought self-regulation is a negative outcome focus system, responsible for survival-like needs and accomplished through avoidance-based behaviour.

This approach-avoidance dichotomy was further elaborated through regulatory focus theory (RFT: E. T. Higgins, 1997) which posits two independent systems of self-regulation: one that is promotion-focused and relates to the wishes and aspirations of the individual, and one that is prevention-focused and concerned with safety and responsibilities. In particular, E. T. Higgins (1997) argues that individuals adopt a particular regulatory focus in a given situation on the basis of their self-regulatory orientation towards future self-states (Bryant & Dunford, 2008). This state of regulatory focus is found to differ across both individuals in its "chronic" form (E. T. Higgins et al., 2001) and across social contexts in its situational form, depending on the respective emphasis upon goals relating to hopes and aspirations, and duties and obligations (Freitas & Higgins, 2002).

These theories demonstrate that identity is a dynamic, reflexive, and multifaceted concept, anchored by memory and yet continuously adapting with time through an on-going process of self-regulation. At the core of this perspective is the agentic role of the individual in determining a sense of identity, and subsequently, his or her actions. As underlined by the proposed role of "standards" (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and "ought self-guides" (E. T. Higgins, 1987) in self-regulation, however, social context also appears to be key in determining identity. Indeed, as argued by Kanagawa, Cross, and Markus (2001, p. 91), "*The content of the working self-concept is determined by the social situation at a given time and by the person's current goals, affect, or motivational state*." It is with this in mind that the following section presents an overview of how identities are formed in relation to social context and interactions with others.

2.2.2 Identity and the Social Self

The notion of a "social self" shaped through social interaction has its roots throughout some of the earliest social psychological bodies of literature. William James (1890 / 2007, p. 294) was amongst the first psychologists to argue in favour of the multiplicity of identity, famously stating, "*A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind*". This notion was elaborated upon by Cooley (1902), who coined the term "the looking glass self" to argue how the self is derived from individuals imagining how they must appear to others, how he or she is likely to be judged as a result, and the production of some form of self-feeling that subsequently influences behaviour. Similarly, Mead (1934 / 2009) identified the interdependence between one's sense of self and sense of other as being essential to the formation of identity, with the self proposed as an entirely social construction that "*can never find expression, and could never have come into existence at all, except in terms of a social environment*" (p. 223).

Whilst sharing a common emphasis on the core role of social interaction, these foundational perspectives represent distinct interpretations of the social

self. In particular, Mead (1934 / 2009) demarcated his symbolic interactionist interpretation of identity from Cooley's (1902) perspective on the basis that the latter, he argued, emphasised social interaction as depending upon "*the imaginations of the individuals involved*" (1934 / 2009, p. 224), and thus emphasised the construction of identity as an introspective endeavour whilst underplaying the influence of an independent, external society. In contrast, the central focus of symbolic interactionism is upon meanings "*as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact*" (Blumer, 1986, p. 5), and has provided the foundation upon which most 'sociological social psychology' research on identity has subsequently been based (Callero, 2003).

From a psychological perspective, social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) represents an influential interpretation of how social others influence the self (e.g. Buunk & Mussweiler, 2001). The essence of Festinger's (1954) original argument was that individuals possess a drive to maintain an accurate and stable self-concept, and thus engage in social comparisons with similar others to validate this self-evaluation. Individuals compare themselves to others who are deemed to be either better-off or worse-off, termed "upward" and "downward" comparisons, respectively (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, VanYperen, & Dakof, 1990; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). Specifically, when the core motivation driving the comparison is self-improvement, individuals have tended to demonstrate a preference for upward comparisons (Buunk et al., 1990; Wood, 1989), whereas when it is for self-enhancement, downward comparisons tend to dominate (Buunk et al., 1990; Buunk & Mussweiler, 2001; Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985).

Though numerous studies have supported these findings, Suls et al. (2002) highlight that the proposed benefits of downward comparisons have received relatively limited experimental support, and contradictory findings are found when these comparisons are conducted spontaneously in daily life. Nevertheless, social comparisons with others also appear to play an important

role in understanding how individuals shift between acting in relation to both their characteristics as an individual and their membership of particular social groups. Arguably the most prominent social psychological interpretation of this phenomenon has been presented through the "social identity perspective" (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner & Reynolds, 2001), comprising of social identity theory (SIT: Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (SCT: Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

The fundamental notion underpinning SIT is that social interactions can be interpreted with respect to an interpersonal-intergroup continuum, where at one extreme individuals will act in terms of their interpersonal relationships and individual characteristics, and at the other, in terms of their membership of social groups or categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Defined as "*the individual's knowledge that he* [sic] *belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership*" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292), social identity is formed through social comparisons that confirm or establish positive distinctions in favour of one's "ingroup" compared to relevant "outgroups", leading to potential ingroup biases that can influence intergroup discrimination and other forms of social conflict (R. Brown, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Reynolds, 2001).

In particular, SIT proposes that favourable social comparisons made in relation to ingroup membership are motivated by the underlying need of individuals to attain a positive self-concept through enhancing their self-esteem (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Tajfel, 1972; Turner, 1975). However, following mixed support for the self-esteem hypothesis (R. Brown, 2000; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998), alternative perspectives have been proposed. For instance, the "uncertainty reduction hypothesis" (Hogg & Abrams, 1993) emphasises how the need to reduce subjective uncertainty about attitudes, feelings, and behaviours relating to the self-concept is a core motivation driving the social categorization of the self (Hogg & Terry, 2000), and subsequently forms the basis of self-categorization theory (SCT: Turner et al., 1987).

Central to SCT is the notion that social categorization involves a process of "depersonalization", in which individuals shift from acting in reference to the unique individual attributes of their personal identity, towards the normative group behaviours associated with a salient social identity (Hogg et al., 1995). Specifically, individuals accentuate similarities and differences in relation to relevant ingroup and outgroup "prototypes", defined as the "*cognitive representation of features that describe and prescribe attributes of the group*" (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 123). Conceptually similar to the self-regulatory "standards" (Carver & Scheier, 1982) and "self-guides" (E. T. Higgins, 1987) previously outlined in Section 2.2.1, prototypes provide stereotyped, context-dependent information about group membership through, for instance, representations of exemplary members who embody the core characteristics of the group (Turner et al., 1987).

Based within the symbolic interactionism perspective, Identity Theory (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1994) offers an alternative proposition that the self is composed of multiple components termed "role identities", with each reflecting the various roles that individuals occupy within society and that become salient within relevant social contexts (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Specifically, role identities provide meaning for the self and represent "*the pivotal concept linking social structure with individual action*" (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 257), with society determining the roles and related sets of behavioural expectations but individuals retaining agency over their actions (Stryker, 1980). Identity Control Theory (Burke, 1991; Burke & Stets, 2009) has since elaborated upon this notion by proposing that meanings and expectations form standards that subsequently guide behaviour, emerging as part of a feedback loop in which environmental inputs are compared against internalised standards.

On the basis of their respective sociological and psychological foundations, Identity Theory and the social identity perspective differ fundamentally with respect to their interpretations of social identity, and

indeed, have traditionally been "*scientifically isolated from one another*" (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 262). Nevertheless, Hogg et al. (1995) emphasise that both share a range of important commonalities, including the motivational role of self-esteem and activation of identity through the notion of salience. Subsequently, Stets and Burke (2000) argue for greater efforts to merge the two perspectives on the basis that differences are more "*a matter of emphasis rather than kind*" (p. 234). A similar point is also reflected in how the social psychological literatures have examined the ways in which individuals present aspects of their social self to the public. It is to this crucial form of identity that the chapter now turns.

2.3 Self-Presentation and Impression Management

According to Baumeister and Tice (1986, p. 65), the "public self" can be defined as "*the totality of how one is known to others – one's reputation and public roles*". The process through which it is regulated is typically referred to as impression management, or self-presentation, and describes the ways in which individuals attempt to control the impressions that real, or imagined, others form of their identity (Jones & Pitmann, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980). Some authors have sought to differentiate impression management and self-presentation on the basis of the former being concerned with managing impressions formed by "others-as-audience", with the latter referring to "self-as-audience" impressions of oneself (e.g. Schlenker, 1980). However, for clarity, this thesis adopts the perspective offered by Leary and Kowalski (1990), whereby the terms are used interchangeably to refer to the management of impressions formed by others.

Arguably one of the most influential theoretical interpretations of impression management was presented by Goffman (1959) in his seminal book, "*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*". Based within symbolic interactionism, Goffman (1959) proposed that individuals engage in self-presentation in order to define their role within a particular social interaction, and thus, control the impressions that others subsequently form of them. Specifically, individuals

engage in two key forms of expression: first, of verbal symbols, "*or their substitutes*" (p. 14), that are deliberately "given" to others to convey a particular meaning, and second, of predominantly non-verbal symbols that are "given off", which can be either intended or unintended. Goffman (1959) utilised a dramaturgical metaphor to liken the subsequent process of giving and giving off expressions to the theatrical performance of an actor to his or her audience.

In doing so, Goffman (1959) distinguished between a "front region", in which the audience is present and where an idealised version of the self is enacted according to a particular social role, and a "back region", in which contradictory performances could be rehearsed, and where the individual could step outside of their carefully crafted public persona. Despite the enduring popularity of Goffman's (1959) interpretation of impression management, he openly acknowledged the limitations of applying the theatrical metaphor to everyday life, admitting it to be "*in part a rhetoric and a manoeuvre*" (p. 254). Furthermore, Goffman (1959) offered few insights into how role-based performances related to the notion of multi-faceted selves (Baggini, 2011), and largely dismissed the significance of internal, psychological factors in favour of external, social factors (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

In contrast, Leary and Kowalski (1990) offered a more integrative approach, with impression management comprising of two discrete components, termed "impression motivation" and "impression construction". With respect to the former, Goffman (1959) suggested that it is in the interest of individuals to control the reactions of others to oneself. Extending this notion, Leary and Kowalski (1990) proposed a range of specific motives for engaging in impression management, such as maintaining self-esteem, constructing an identity for oneself, and achieving desirable social and material outcomes, including the widely acknowledged self-enhancement bias and drive for maintaining a positive, socially desirable identity (e.g. Baumeister, 1982; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

A key element of impression motivation is the potential role of individual differences in the extent to which public image is a concern (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). In particular, the concept of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) refers to the degree that individuals engage in expressive control over their behaviour in public situations. High self-monitors typically display flexibility and sensitivity towards the immediate social context and appropriate behavioural norms, whilst low self-monitors rely primarily upon their own values and attitudes to guide behaviour regardless of the social conventions (e.g. Lennox & Wolfe, 1984). Subsequently, self-monitoring appears to influence a range of impression management behaviours, from reading the facial expressions of others to preferring social situations that present clear behavioural expectations (Snyder, 1987), although there has been significant debate with regards to the psychometric structure of the construct (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000).

The second component of Leary and Kowalski's (1990) impression management model reflects to the ways in which individuals approach the construction and control of impressions formed about them. With respect to determining how to behave, Leary and Kowalski (1990) argue that individuals refer to desirable and undesirable self-images in order to guide how they would like to be perceived, reflecting Markus and Nurius' (1986) notion of possible selves and the promotion-prevention systems underpinning regulatory focus theory (E. T. Higgins, 1997). In addition to Goffman's (1959) proposal that individuals give and give off verbal and non-verbal forms of expression to specific audiences, a number of researchers have outlined common self-presentational strategies that individuals apply in order to foster particular impressions.

One prominent example is the work by Jones and Pitmann (1982), who found that individuals engage in a wide range of impression management strategies, from self-promotion in order to appear competent, exemplification to seem righteous, and intimidation to appear powerful, to supplication in situations where exaggerating weaknesses or deficiencies may be beneficial. In

particular, one of the most common strategies employed appears to be the use of ingratiation tactics, with imitation and flattery used to appear more likable (Jones & Pitmann, 1982; Schlenker, 1980). However, individuals are also frequently faced with situations in which their public identity is threatened (e.g. Schlenker, 1987). In such situations, individuals may engage in "account giving" behaviours such as claiming innocence, providing justification, making excuses, or apologising in order to minimise potentially negative consequences (Schlenker, 1980, 1982).

Impression management tactics may also need to focus on the reparation of identity, for instance, compensating for undesirable assessments of a particular personal attribute by emphasising the positivity of other, unrelated attributes (Baumeister & Jones, 1978). Alternatively, individuals may adopt a more indirect strategy and opt to "bask in the reflected glory" (Cialdini et al., 1976) of associated successful others. Specifically, Cialdini and Richardson (1980) found that following a publicly visible personal failure, college students not only enhanced the standing of their own university, but also "blasted" that of their rival institution in order to maintain a positive impression for themselves, echoing the notions of ingroup bias and outgroup discrimination previously discussed in relation to social identity theory.

Whether direct or indirect, promotion or prevention-focused, the broad range of impression management strategies adopted by individuals appears to reflect the complexity involved in constructing and maintaining a positive, socially desirable public image. One context in which many of these strategies can have important professional consequences is during "organisational entry" (Wanous, 1976), where individuals must first successfully complete the recruitment and selection process, and then negotiate a sustained period of organisational socialisation and assimilation (e.g. Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). As this thesis is concerned specifically with personal and professional aspects of social identity, the following section

now outlines the role of impression management during this period of professional transition.

2.3.1 Impression Management and Organisational Entry

Organisational entry represents a key phase in which social identities are redefined and negotiated in relation to a professional audience (Cable & Kay, 2012). As such, a number of researchers have adapted the work of Jones and Pitmann (1982) to the context of organisational behaviour, for instance representing self-promotional behaviour through making others aware of one's work-related achievements and experience, and engaging in ingratiation tactics such as complimenting colleagues and offering to do favours (e.g. Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Specifically, Wayne and Ferris (1990) found that the use of such tactics was positively related to supervisor liking and performance ratings, and the findings reported by Bolino and Turnley (2003) indicated that high self-monitors tended to emphasise positive impression management tactics within the workplace.

Impression management also appears to be an especially important facet of job interviews, in which the ultimate goal is to impress recruiters sufficiently to receive an offer of employment (Barrick, Shaffer, & DeGrassi, 2009). Specifically, job candidates have been found to engage in self-promotion and ingratiation self-presentational strategies in order to successfully influence favourable judgments from interviewers (Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), although the influence appears to be stronger when interviews are unstructured (Barrick et al., 2009) and when ingratiation rather than self-promotional tactics are adopted (C. A. Higgins & Judge, 2004). Additionally, Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) found evidence indicating that extraverted applicants made greater use of such self-promotion tactics, while agreeableness was positively associated with the use of non-verbal behaviours, such as head nodding.

However, not all job applicants may choose to accentuate the professionally desirable aspects of their identity, regardless of the expectations

to do so in the context. For instance, in Cable and Kay's (2012) large scale study of organisational entry and self-verification striving - a concept relating to how people prefer to bring others to see them for how they see themselves (Swann Jr, Pelham, & Krull, 1989) - it was concluded that "*despite the strong incentives to self-promote in the organizational entry domain … some job applicants are motivated to communicate self-reflective information when it is less than ideal*" (Cable & Kay, p. 376). This finding appears to underscore Leary and Kowalski's (1990) identification of motivation as a key component of impression management, where preference for authentic self-expression superseded the influence of otherwise well-defined normative expectations.

Whilst a number of studies have addressed the ways in which impression management tactics are used in face-to-face situations prior to and following organisational entry, the study of reputation management has received only minimal attention, often being treated as an incidental by-product of behaviour rather than a goal in itself (Bromley, 1993; Craik, 2008; Emler, 1990). Nevertheless, reputation appears to play a key role in enabling the identification of potentially suitable candidates through the existing offline social networks of employees (Ollington, Gibb, & Harcourt, 2013). In this sense, community-based judgements of professional suitability can be as important as direct social interactions for prospective employees. With this in mind, the following section now examines the concept of reputation management as a specific form of self-presentation with particular relevance to the research questions addressed within the current thesis.

2.3.2 From Impression to Reputation Management

Though a universally accepted definition of reputation remains elusive, the concept is nonetheless intuitively familiar (e.g. Zinko, Ferris, Blass, & Laird, 2007). In a legal context, reputation has for centuries embodied the notion of possessing a "good name" (Conte & Paolucci, 2002, p. 16) or being "regarded in a good light" (Posner, 1990, p. 58), and therefore worthy of being defended rigorously. Indeed, the apparent fragility of reputation as a social commodity

was captured by Socrates' (cited in Clippinger, 2011, p. 25) oft-cited observation that "*credit is like fire; when once you have kindled it you may easily preserve it, but if you once extinguish it, you will find it an arduous task to rekindle it again"*. A similar sentiment was echoed more recently by Solove (2007, p. 34), who described reputation as *"the delicate porcelain vessel that carries our ability to function in society*."

From a social psychological perspective, reputation is further complicated by the proposal that like social identities, individual have as many different reputations as they do stakeholder or interest groups (Emler, 1990), with the salience of each to the individual depending on the social situation (Bromley, 2001). At its core, reputation is interpreted as a social representation consisting of judgments about a person, shared amongst a specific group or community (Bromley, 2001; Craik, 2008; Emler, 1990), and thus representing a form of "meta-belief" (Bromley, 2001; Conte & Paolucci, 2002) that exists as a "*collective phenomenon… not an impression in the head of any one individual*" (Emler, 1990, p. 171). This point was captured by Zinko et al. (2007), who in drawing upon earlier work by Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, and Treadway (2003) provide one of the most comprehensive definitions:

> *"Reputation is a perceptual identity formed from the collective perceptions of others, which is reflective of the complex combination of salient personal characteristics and accomplishments, demonstrated behaviour, and intended images presented over some period of time as observed directly and/or reported from secondary sources, which reduces ambiguity about expected future behavior." (p. 165)*

Two aspects of Zinko and colleagues' (2007) perspective merit further discussion here. First, a unique characteristic of reputation is the way in which it is influenced by information provided by secondary sources, such as through gossip or hearsay, as well as direct observations of behaviour (Craik, 2008; Emler, 1990; Solove, 2007). As reflected in the social cognitive model proposed by Conte and Paolucci (2002), reputation can be represented as a highly dynamic and reflexive phenomenon, cycling between levels of "individual

cognition" and "social propagation" (p. 72), and thus, subject to alterations through corruption, deception, and error. As observed by Solove (2007), this creates a fascinating paradox in which reputation management is both within and outside of an individual's control, where reputation may at times be compatible with the self-concept, whilst at other times, entirely dissonant.

The second important element reflected by Zinko et al's (2007) definition is the way in which reputation serves as a social proxy, offering others a way in which to judge the behavioural consistency of an individual (Emler, 1990; Milewicz & Herbig, 1994). According to Emler (1990), it is because of the relative consistency of human behaviour that audiences are able to form impressions and evaluative judgments about individuals beyond immediate social interactions, leading to the proposition that it is the "*continuity and interconnectedness of audiences* [that] *turns impression management into reputation management*" (p. 183).

The temporal and spatial dimensions introduced by the concept of reputation have important implications for how individuals may attempt to influence the judgments of others. For instance, Craik (2008) proposes that strategic reputation management consists of three core components: first, monitoring and evaluating what is being said about oneself; second, allowing and preventing certain aspects of information to flow by altering the access of a relevant community or "reputation network"; and third, seeking to shape the nature of the information by engaging in self-presentational behaviour, such as those outlined previously in Section 2.3.1. Therefore, reputation management requires individuals to regulate their behaviour not only in accordance with the impressions formed by an immediate and visible audience, but also audiences who may be unknown, or will become relevant only in the future.

The chapter now turns to focus on a fundamental argument of this thesis, in which it is proposed that particular aspects of how social media technologies are designed complicate the process of reputation management further. These affordances present an emergent set of risks with respect to how individuals,

and in particular young adults, are able to sustain a reputation that will be judged favourably by both prospective and current employers. In particular, the following sections will outline how the visibility, persistence, spreadability, and searchability of social interactions online both complicate and challenge the previously outlined theoretical interpretations of social identity and impression management behaviour. The chapter will focus on the implications for young adults using social media, and in particular, the reputational consequences from failing to maintain boundaries between personal and professional facets of life online. First, however, the following section presents a brief overview of social media and the scope of the term within this thesis.

2.4 Social Media, Reputation, and Emergent Risks

2.4.1 Defining Social Media

With over two billion active users, distributed across hundreds of sites and catering for a broad spectrum of audience ages, locations, and interests (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kemp, 2014; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011), the sheer variety in form and function of social media makes it a term that is at once both widely understood, and yet simultaneously elusive to define. At their core, social media represent a form of computer-mediated communication through which users may share content. This perspective is also reflected in one of the most commonly cited definitions of social media offered by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61),

> "*Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content*."

A core component of Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) interpretation, therefore, is the association between social media, as a form of umbrella concept, and "Web 2.0" (O'Reilly, 2005), a term commonly used to refer to the proposed transformation in the character of the Internet following the collapse of the dot-com economic "bubble" in 2001 (O'Reilly, 2007). According to O'Reilly (2007),

this included a marked shift from the relatively static content publication of "Web 1.0" (2007, p. 18) to a more dynamic and collective web involving blogging, the harnessing of collective intelligence through crowdsourcing, "folksonomies" - a type of social classification and indexing (Vander Wal, 2005) - and focus upon the delivery of rich user experiences.

Though the term and concept of Web 2.0 has been dismissed by the founder of the "WorldWideWeb", Tim Berners-Lee, as "a piece of jargon" (Laningham, 2006), and elsewhere as "vacuous marketing hype" (Bray, 2005), Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that user generated content (UGC) has been key to the development of the social web. Defined as "*the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users*" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61), UGC and its alternative title, "user-created content" (UCC: Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007), underscore the element of collective and creative endeavour that appears to have set social media, and more broadly the "participative web", apart from its "Web 1.0" predecessor. From this perspective, individuals have been positioned as having agency over not only the information they consume, but what they create and share with others through self-presentation (e.g. Grossman, 2006).

According to Kietzmann et al. (2011), types of social media can be distinguished with respect to the range of functionalities that they provide users. In particular, the authors propose that sites vary in the extent to which they enable users to share and receive content, form relationships, develop communities, communicate with other users, know when others are available online, express aspects of the self, and gauge social standing within particular communities. Adopting a broader typological approach, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) present a taxonomy of social media in relation to two specific dimensions: first, the degree to which the site or application offers social intimacy, immediacy, and reduction of uncertainty in the communication between users, and second, the extent to which the form of social media enables self-presentation, and the disclosure of personal information.

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Figure 1. Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) classification of social media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure

As illustrated by Figure 1, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) propose six distinct types of social media, although collaborative projects, defined as sites that "*enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end-users*" (p. 62), and virtual social and game worlds are not directly relevant to the focus on professional risk and digital reputation within the current thesis. Specifically, collaborative projects, such as Wikipedia, appear to offer limited potential for self-presentation or self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 62), with user identities typically restricted to pseudonymous usernames and the core motivation of use based upon collaborative editing rather than social interaction. Virtual game worlds, such as World of Warcraft, and virtual social worlds, such as Second Life, focus more upon self-presentation and interpersonal behaviour, though tend to involve pseudonymous virtual personas with limited integration with other forms of social media, thus limiting the likelihood of online behaviour posing professional risk to the user.

Additionally, with respect to Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) classifications of blogs and content communities, much of their ascribed functionality has in recent years appeared to have become subsumed within the diverse category of social network sites (SNSs). For instance, LiveJournal, an early blogging site from 1999, blended journal entries with personal profile pages and defined lists of networked "friends", typical of SNSs (boyd & Ellison, 2007), and Twitter is referred to interchangeably as both a "micro-blogging" service (Kwak, Chun, & Moon, 2011) and a social network site (Lerman & Ghosh, 2010). Similarly,

content communities sites, defined as sites and applications facilitating "*the sharing of media content between users*" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 63), cover a wide range of multimedia, from photos (e.g. Instagram) and presentation slides (e.g. Slideshare), to music (e.g. Spotify) and video (e.g. YouTube), which have since been integrated into the design of many SNSs, which are now addressed in the following section.

2.4.2 Social Network Sites

Emerging in the late 1990s, a "*diffuse – and sometimes improbable – range*" (Ellison & boyd, 2013, p. 151) of social network sites have developed in the last two decades, characterised primarily by their emphasis on personal profiles, articulated networks, and communication and content sharing as the key drivers of use, rather than the act of networking itself (boyd, 2010; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison, 2013). Capturing these points, Ellison and boyd (2013, p. 158) present a working definition of SNSs whereby,

> "*A social network site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-level data; 2) can publically articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site*."

Launched in 2004, Facebook currently represents one of the largest and best-known SNSs, having initially been developed to enable Harvard University students to share and access information about local events and each other, emulating the paper-based student directories traditionally produced within the institution (Kirkpatrick, 2010). For the exclusively student demographic using Facebook in its formative years, its profile-centric and networked design enabled users to stay connected with friends made within the offline world (Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfeld, 2006; Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe, 2006; Joinson, 2008; Sheldon, 2008). By 2006, the site had expanded access from 800

college, university, and high school networks to over 22,000 commercial organisations, and eventually, all people over the age of 13 years (Wilson et al, 2012), leading to a monumental increase in the number of unique monthly visitors to the site, from 52.2 million in June 2007 to 132.1 million by June 2008. At the current time of writing in 2015, over 1.35 billion individuals use the site every month (Facebook, 2015).

Whilst the popularity of many competing SNSs such as Friendster, Bebo, and more recently, Google+, eventually dwindled, Twitter has developed a prominent role within mainstream culture since its launch in 2006. As outlined by Kwak et al. (2011), the bi-directional connections of friendship on Facebook are replaced on Twitter by a follower dynamic, whereby, "*the relationship of following and being followed requires no reciprocation. A user can follow any other user, and the user being followed need not follow back*" (p.1). Additionally, instead of Facebook's "status updates", the primary form of communication upon Twitter is the "tweet": "*an expression of a moment or idea* [that] *can contain text, photos, and videos*" (Twitter, 2015). Limited to just 140 characters, tweets can be acted upon in various ways, including being directed at specific users, being "retweeted" by other users, or even being collated into a stream of related tweets using the "#", or "hashtag" symbol.

Similar to Facebook's "newsfeed" feature, Twitter users are able to view all of the tweets shared by the people that they follow via a continuously updating stream of information, with their own tweets similarly entering the newsfeeds of their followers. However, whereas friends upon Facebook tend to be known by the user in the offline world (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) and public access denied through the use of relatively restrictive privacy settings (Madden, 2012), this is typically not the case upon Twitter, where most users select the service's default setting of public accessibility (e.g. Krishnamurthy & Wills, 2008). With the number of monthly active users of Twitter now exceeding 284 million people, in turn sharing over 500 million tweets per day (Twitter, 2015), the potential for users to attract vast numbers of followers and reach vast

audiences has seen the site embraced not only by regular citizens, but by organisations, news media outlets, and public figures seeking to develop a public presence online (Hargittai & Litt, 2011, p. 826; Marwick & boyd, 2011b).

Social networks have also been used for professional means since the earliest years of social media (boyd and Ellison, 2007). LinkedIn is a particularly prominent example, having launched in 2003 for the purpose of helping professionals to connect with one another, communicate professional accomplishments, and search for jobs. Specifically, LinkedIn provides its users with relatively static profile pages that function as online resumes, with the platform requiring various elements of verification before connection requests can be sent to others (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). After its first month of operation, LinkedIn (2015) hosted 4,500 members within its network, though in the present day this has expanded to more than 332 million individuals using the site to promote their work-related credentials.

Whilst the professional context of interactions on LinkedIn is relatively well-defined and understood by users (e.g. Papacharissi, 2009), this is not necessarily the case upon Facebook and Twitter, where the boundaries between personal and professional social spheres are more ambiguous. Drawing upon Meyrowitz's (1985) proposition that human behaviour is influenced by the ways in which broadcast media collapse different social contexts, boyd (2010) contends that networked technologies, such those embodied by social media, extend and complicate the notion of a shared "public sphere" (Habermas, 1991) by influencing the ways in which information is presented, and how individuals socially interact with one another. Specifically, boyd (2010, p. 39) defines the notion of "networked publics" as:

> "*publics that are restructured by networked technologies* [that] *are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice*."

Due to the mediated nature of interaction within these spaces, boyd (2014) highlights the role of design "affordances" in influencing user behaviour. This concept refers to the various possibilities of action in the relationship between an individual and a particular environment or object (Gibson, 1979), and has been applied widely within the field of human-computer interaction (HCI). In Donald Norman's (2002) seminal text, "*The Design of Everyday Things*", the notion of "perceived affordances" was introduced to describe actions perceived as being possible by the user, and, therefore, useful in informing the design of system interfaces. boyd (2014) proposes four distinct affordances that play important roles in shaping the actions of users: persistence, visibility, spreadability, and searchability. This chapter now outlines each of these affordances, focusing specifically on their relevance to the theoretical perspectives of social identity and reputation management discussed previously in this chapter.

2.4.3 Persistence

The affordance of "persistence" refers to the notion that content shared upon social media typically "sticks around" for an undetermined time (boyd, 2014). Also referred to as "durability", Mayer-Schönberger (2009) argues that this affordance has gained prominence as society has become increasingly digitalised and technologies have become cheaper, larger, and faster in enabling the storage and retrieval of data. Thus, as digital remembering has gradually emerged as the default approach for how the Internet handles the storage of digital data produced by its users, the subsequent demise in forgetting online has led to potentially vast amounts of personal information being hosted upon the web, ultimately leading to "*a continuous erosion of an individual's control over their personal information*" (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009, p. 100).

The resulting trail of online data produced by individuals as they interact with social media, commonly referred to as their "digital footprint" (e.g. Sellen, Rogers, Harper, & Rodden, 2009), subsequently plays an fundamental role in the construction of digital identity as people come to know others not simply

through their present day actions but also those of the past. This has profound implications for the ways in which individuals engage in self-presentation, and by extension, the appropriateness of Goffman's (1959) performance metaphor for representing the process of online impression management. In particular, boyd (2014) argues that a key challenge for self-presentation upon social media is that online social interactions possess an asynchronous quality that is markedly distinct from the largely synchronous, ephemeral nature of interactions conducted in offline, public environments.

A key implication of this distinction is that in the context of social media, an audience is often able to witness not only the most recent actions of an individual, but also those persisting from an earlier timeframe in which the information may no longer be relevant, or was intended for an entirely different audience or social context. It is in this sense that the conceptualisation of reputation as a "perceptual identity" consisting partly of judgments obtained through secondary sources appears to become particularly relevant (Craik, 2008; Zinko et al., 2007). Specifically, social media appears to introduce a further temporal element in the form of direct observations of social interactions that occurred in the past but were not necessarily intended for the observer.

A further challenge posed by the asynchronous nature of self-presentation upon social media, therefore, is the lack of direct access that users have to the recipients of their online social interactions. Subsequently, users must instead rely upon their perceptions of an "imagined audience" (Litt, 2012; Marwick & boyd, 2011a), tailoring their behaviour in relation to who they believe will have access to the content, rather than from physical indications of social presence in the immediate moment. With social interaction playing an important role in the negotiation of identity by enabling individuals to receive feedback in response to their actions, the process of self-presentation becomes increasingly complex upon social media, where in "*the absence of certain knowledge about audience, participants take cues from the social media environment to imagine community*" (Marwick & boyd, 2011a, p. 2).

Additionally, due to the persistence of digital data, individuals are faced with imagining not only the reactions of their immediate online audience but also those of audiences who may gain access to the information in the future (Litt, 2012; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). In recent years, various case studies and researchers have illustrated how the failure of young adults to do so can later lead to unexpectedly profound professional consequences later in life (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009; Ronson, 2015; Solove, 2007), as illustrated by the case of Paris Brown discussed previously in Chapter 1. As argued by Solove (2007, p. 11), it appears that in this respect, "*the Internet is indeed a cruel historian*". Nevertheless, the persistence of data upon social media is not the only affordance of the technology to influence self-presentation, as the following section now outlines in addressing the visibility of social interactions online.

2.4.4 Visibility

A second affordance proposed by boyd (2014) is that of "visibility", referring to the often publicly accessible nature of online behaviour. In particular, boyd (2014) argues that social media are typically designed to enable users to easily share content with audience sizes that would otherwise be difficult to achieve in a physical setting. As network sizes increase, however, so too does the likelihood that members of distinct social groups will be co-located within the same digital space (e.g. Binder, Howes, & Sutcliffe, 2009; Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012). Drawing upon the previously outlined social psychological interpretation of identity as multi-faceted and influenced by social context, Ozenc and Farnham (2011, p. 561) argue that social media "*carry problematic assumptions in their implicit models of social organization: that one identity, and one social context, fits all.*" Similarly, Farnham and Churchill (2011, p. 1) argue that a "*particularly problematic trend in social media design is the assumption that a single unified user identity is appropriate and sufficient*."

Indeed, these issues appear to be reflected in the perspective adopted by the creator of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, who was quoted by Kirkpatrick (2010) as proposing that,

> "*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. The level of transparency the world has now won't support having two identities for a person*." (p. 199)

This perspective contrasts starkly with the majority of social psychological research examining the multi-faceted and dynamic character of social identity and self-presentation. As outlined previously, a core component of self-categorization theory (SCT: Turner et al., 1987) is that the adoption of a particular social identity is based upon its respective salience to an individual within a given social situation. Similarly, Goffman (1959) and Leary and Kowalski's (1990) accounts of impression management highlighted the respective roles of social interaction and impression-related goals in shaping the contours of self-presentation, though primarily in reference to clearly defined social contexts rather than the co-location of multiple audiences within a singular space.

The contribution of the persistence and visibility of social interactions upon social media to this shift has led to the discussion of a phenomenon termed "context collapse" (boyd, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2011a). In particular, it is argued that context collapse influences behaviour by increasing the difficulty for individual users to switch between aspects of their social identity when presenting to distinct social groups within a single public space, without compromising the respective levels of authenticity or consistency in either case (e.g. Hewitt & Forte, 2006). According to Binder et al. (2009), the fundamental psychological need to maintain boundaries between these distinct groups, or "social spheres", has important implications for users of SNSs, which, through the affordances of persistence and visibility, create a "*problem of conflicting social spheres*" (2009, p. 966).

In particular, Binder et al. (2009) demonstrated that although the degree of tension experienced in using Facebook is associated with larger network sizes, a

better predictor is that of greater network diversity, with the number of family members within a network appearing to play a particularly important role in predicting online tension. Similar conclusions were also drawn by Farnham and Churchill (2011) from their study of email and SNS use, finding that many respondents reported engaging with a range of facets to their identity, with some notably incompatible and subsequently leading to increased tension in the form of worry about self-disclosure upon Facebook. In particular, family was again identified as a particularly important facet of identity, and worry about self-disclosure was especially pronounced for young working males (Farnham & Churchill, 2011).

Binder and colleagues (2009) also found that the presence of work contacts within mixed online networks had little discernible effect on self-reported online tension. This was interpreted by the authors as possibly reflecting the notion that tension relating to conflict with this particular social sphere may depend on specific professional relationships rather than the extent of their representation within the network (Binder et al., 2009). However, an earlier study by Hewitt and Forte (2006) found that despite undergraduate students rating their professors extremely positively on a range of dimensions, almost one-third of male and two-thirds of female respondents believed that academic staff shouldn't be using Facebook, expressing anxiety over the potential observation of personal activity upon the site.

Similar concerns were also relayed by interviewees in Skeels and Grudin's (2009) study of the use of Facebook in the workplace. Specifically, a number of employees described the tensions and increased complexities of self-presentation involved as work colleagues became accepted as "Friends" within their Facebook network, with some expressing the desire to create entirely separate networks in order to avoid an overlap between personal and professional social spheres (Skeels & Grudin, 2009). The need for such strategies of boundary maintenance appears to be indicative of the increasingly blurred distinction between the domains of the workplace and home (Nippert-Eng,

2010), with social media contributing further by skewing traditional offline demarcations of space and time, such as physical locations and set working hours.

The social computing literature outlines two particular approaches that individuals tend to adopt as a result of the visibility, or "accessibility" (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009), of data upon social media. First, individuals can use the privacy controls provided by social media as a strategy for demarcating social boundaries within and outside of their online social networks (e.g. Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012). Indeed, social media sites adopt distinct approaches to privacy, from Facebook's list-based settings where user profiles can be restricted to both the wider public and defined groups within the user's network (e.g. Debatin et al., 2009) and Google+'s more nuanced "Circles" approach to grouping networked contacts (Kairam, Brzozowski, Huffaker, & Chi, 2012), to Twitter's binary option of setting tweet visibility to either publicly accessible or "protected". According to boyd (2014, p. 12), "*in networked publics, interactions are often public by default, private through effort*", and this has previously been found to be the case on both Facebook (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Gross & Acquisti, 2005) and Twitter (e.g. Krishnamurthy & Wills, 2008).

An alternative approach adopted by individuals is to closely self-regulate the information that they disclose online. As outlined by Lampinen, Tamminen, and Oulasvirta (2009), social media users manage the co-presence of distinct social groups such as friends, family, and employers by engaging in both behavioural and mental strategies, including self-censorship, limiting use of the site, and creating more inclusive in-group identities. Building on this latter point, Hogan (2010) and Marwick and boyd (2011a) argue that context collapse on social media leads individuals to post only content that all of the groups within their social network will find non-offensive, thus tailoring their self-presentation based upon a "lowest common denominator" approach.

Subsequently, Hogan (2010) proposed that in addition to thinking of social media users as actors performing for audiences within a particular

situation, online self-presentation also involves asynchronous interactions in which the user must adopt the role of a curator, managing and distributing "artifacts" over time as part of a set of "exhibitions". X. Zhao et al. (2013) sought to examine how the two metaphors applied in their relatively small study of Facebook users, finding evidence for three distinct "regions": first, a performance region consistent with Goffman (1959), in which content was created for a situationally-relevant audience; second, an exhibition region consistent with Hogan (2010), where past content and network connections were managed over time; and third, a personal region, in which past content provided intrinsic value to users through reflecting or reminiscing about its personal meaning rather than its public reception. As illustrated by the affordance of spreadability discussed in the following section, however, public reception is nevertheless a salient concern for many social media users.

2.4.5 Spreadability

In outlining the "spreadable" affordance of social media, boyd (2014) refers to the way in which many sites enable users to easily share content with others, who in turn are able to share it throughout their networks, and so on. This form of propagation has also been referred to in terms of "virality" (Mills, 2012), with the propagation of content spreading in an exponential manner likened to that observed with biological viruses. Indeed, this affordance has formed the basis of "viral marketing", defined as "*electronic word of mouth ... transmitted in an exponentially growing way*" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011, p. 255). This affordance has implications not only for carefully planned marketing campaigns, however, but also for regular individuals, such as Felix "PewDiePie" Kjelberg and fellow YouTube celebrities who have independently produced videos viewed by millions of users, subsequently generating millions of dollars in advertising revenue for both themselves and the site (Jacobs, 2014).

Similarly, Twitter provides a platform upon which content is typically broadcast to both "subscribed" followers and the wider public (D. Zhao & Rosson, 2009, p. 248), with the site enabling its users to not only follow the lives

of famous people upon the site (Hargittai & Litt, 2011), but to become celebrities themselves through the public visibility of their actions. According to Marwick and boyd (2011a, 2011b), young adults using Twitter engage in techniques of "micro-celebrity" to strategically self-promote and attract attention, regardless of their number of followers. In doing so, users appear to engage in a form of self-commodification (Marwick, 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2011a), or "personal branding" (Montoya & Vandehey, 2002; Peters, 1997), in which a public persona is carefully and strategically constructed in a similar manner to how a corporate brand might market its products, or a public relations officer might manage the image of a celebrity client.

Echoing elements of Peters' (1997) perspective on personal branding, Schawbel (2009) underlines the power of social media as a platform enabling individuals to create authentic, yet personally profitable public identities. The notion of identity possessing economic valued is reflected in Akerlof and Kranton's (2010) concept of "Identity Economics", in which the authors emphasise how identity-based social norms associated with distinct social categories determine economic utility. Adopting the assumption that individuals are able to actively choose their identities, Akerlof and Kranton (2010, p. 15) conclude that doing so "*may be the most important "economic" decision a person ever makes*"; a belief that appears to permeate much of the literature on personal branding and social media (Fertik & Thompson, 2010; Marwick, 2013; Mayfield, 2010; Schawbel, 2009) and that is reflected in Schmidt and Cohen's (2013, p. 36) vision that "*Identity will become the most valuable commodity for citizens in the future, and it will exist primarily online*".

Nevertheless, the affordance of spreadability not only assists users in building a professional reputation through self-promotion, but also provides good reason for individuals to monitor and protect it. As discussed in Chapter 1, numerous young adults have found themselves the subject of intense public scrutiny and criticism as a result of their online misdemeanours. Like Paris Brown, Justine Sacco, a 30-year-old public relations employee, shared a

misjudged tweet with her 170 Twitter followers prior to boarding for a flight in 2013 ("*Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just kidding. I'm white*!"), finding that on arrival she had become the number one trending topic on Twitter and had already lost her job (Ronson, 2015). In this particular case, the affordances of persistence, visibility, and spreadability each assisted in the global condemnation of Ms Sacco's online actions, although it was a fourth and final affordance that enabled her past and present online behaviour to be linked with her real, offline identity, and therefore lead to profoundly damaging consequences for her professional reputation.

2.4.6 Searchability

The affordance of "searchability" was proposed by boyd (2014) to refer to the way in which social media enables content to be found with relative ease by others, whether through dedicated search engines, such as Google, Yahoo! and Bing, or within social media sites themselves, such as Facebook's powerful "Graph Search" functionality. According to Mayer-Schönberger (2009), a key facet of "digital remembering" is its comprehensiveness, not simply through the vast storage of data or its capability to be widely accessed, but through its collation in an easily searchable format. Subsequently, the affordance of searchability enables potentially vast amounts of social information to be discovered about individuals with relative ease, with social media profiles providing a wealth of personal information.

One key factor enabling the discovery of such information is through the implementation of "real name policies" by a number of social media sites (boyd, 2012; Hogan, 2012). In particular, Facebook and Google+ have strictly enforced the use of authentic identities, purportedly so that users may conveniently find and connect with one another, in addition to potentially limiting the likelihood of anti-social behaviour by increasing personal accountability (e.g. Christopherson, 2007; Edwards & McAuley, 2013). Real name policies have, however, led to a debate about their implications for privacy, freedom of speech, and mass surveillance of users (e.g. Edwards & McAuley, 2013). For instance, the launch of

Google+ and the extension of its real-name policy to other Google services in 2011 led to the service removing users with seemingly "inauthentic" usernames. Subsequently referred to as "the nymwars", the decision generated widespread criticism and debate with regards to the relationship between "real" and digital identities (e.g. boyd, 2012; Hogan, 2012), eventually culminating in a public apology and reversal in policy from Google in 2014 (Kumparak, 2014).

According to Hogan (2012), real name policies reflect the way in which the web has evolved over the preceding two decades, from the initial provision of virtual spaces and "fantasy worlds" (Turkle, 1995, p. 26) in which identities were idealised and largely dissociated from the offline world, to a "real name web", characterised by a comprehensive level of personal detail, dense network connections, and the normalcy of the social web in everyday life. As noted by Ellison (2013), the terminology of "real" and "virtual" worlds often employed throughout early literature on the Internet implies a disconnect between offline and online identity which, with the introduction of social media, she argues has become increasingly blurred. However, as well as enabling individuals to locate one another online, the visibility and searchability of authentic identities upon social media has also presented organisations with unprecedented opportunities. As argued by Schmidt and Cohen (2013, p. 36),

> *"The communication technologies we use today are invasive by design, collecting our photos, comments and friends into giant databases that are searchable and, in the absence of outside regulation, fair game for employers, university admissions personnel and town gossips. We are what we tweet."*

In recent years, recruiters have increasingly exploited the searchability of digital identities, using social media as an accessible and cost-effective source through which to identify, screen, and contact potential candidates (Davison, Maraist, & Bing, 2011; Kluemper et al., 2012). Referred to variously as "social network screening" (Kluemper et al., 2012), "social media (SM) assessment" (Roth, Bobko, Van Iddekinge, & Thatcher, 2013), "online recruitment" (Ollington et al., 2013), and "social recruiting" (Doherty, 2010; Jobvite, 2014b; Root &

McKay, 2014), numerous surveys indicate a high prevalence of human resource professionals and recruiters using social media to conduct background checks on job applicants, ranging from just over one-third to over half (Cross-Tab, 2010; SHRM, 2013), and in some cases exceeding as many as 90 percent of respondents (Jobvite, 2013, 2014b; Reppler, 2011).

Given its emphasis upon professional networking, the identification and assessment of LinkedIn profiles appears to be a core component of social recruiting practice, with between half to more than nine out of every ten recruiters reportedly doing so (Jobvite, 2013, 2014b; Reppler, 2011; SHRM, 2013). Nevertheless, between one- to two-thirds of recruiters admit to viewing the Facebook profiles of potential candidates to assess their suitability (CareerBuilder, 2012; Jobvite, 2014b; Reppler, 2011), while just under one-fifth indicate doing so with Twitter (Jobvite, 2014b). Between one-third to two-thirds of recruiters report forming professional judgments of candidates directly on the basis of their social media use, both positively in terms of their likely fit with the organisation's culture or "well-roundedness" and negatively in relation to behaviours such as use of profanity, poor spelling and grammar, drink and illegal drug references, and posts of a sexual nature (CareerBuilder, 2012; Cross-Tab, 2010; Jobvite, 2014b; Reppler, 2011).

The value of including Facebook, in particular, as part of the social recruiting process is reflected by the finding that self-presentation behaviour upon Facebook often accurately reflects the authentic personality of users, rather than idealistic representations (Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011; Gosling, Gaddis, & Vazire, 2007). For instance, Back et al. (2010) found evidence that with the exception of neuroticism, self-ratings for four of the five personality domains in the Five Factor Model (Costa & McCrae, 1992a) correlated positively with independent ratings of personality by undergraduate research assistants viewing the participants' profiles. Similarly, Kluemper and Rosen (2009) found that trained raters were able to accurately distinguish between individuals scoring high and low on four of the big-five personality

traits, intelligence, and performance, based solely upon a ten minute evaluation of Facebook profiles.

Kluemper et al. (2012) also identified a positive relationship between agreeableness and conscientiousness ratings of Facebook profiles and "hirability" ratings, suggesting that portraying information about these traits upon social media may be particularly important in influencing judgments made by recruiters. These findings have not received universal support, however. For instance, Van Iddekinge et al. (2013) found that recruiter ratings for the Facebook profiles of recently employed graduates were unrelated to supervisor ratings of job performance, turnover intentions, and actual turnover. Furthermore, ratings tended to favour female and white applicants, leading Van Iddekinge et al. (2013) to conclude that using social media information to assess job candidates could be a risky practice with respect to discrimination.

Similar concerns have also been echoed by V. R. Brown and Vaughn (2011), Kluemper (2013), and Davison et al. (2011), who all highlighted the need for more research examining how social recruiting may lead to violations of user privacy, legal claims of discriminatory action, and moral implications in forming professional judgments about users without their knowledge or the opportunity for rebuttal. In particular, V. R. Brown and Vaughn (2011) warn that hiring managers engaging in social recruiting are at risk of committing the fundamental attribution error (L. Ross, 1977), whereby the effect of disposition is overestimated and conversely, that of the situation is underestimated. Similarly, given the reflexive nature of social identity and that the "*accurate assessment of others is socially adaptive*" (Bromley, 1993, p. 55), the covert nature of the social recruiting also challenges the validity and reliability of judgments formed through the practice (V. R. Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Davison et al., 2011; Gueutal, Kluemper, & Rosen, 2009; Kluemper, 2013).

These points are particularly salient when considering the use of social media to judge the employability of young adults yet to enter the workplace. According to Emler (1990), a fundamental assumption underpinning the process

of reputation management is that individuals are aware of being in possession of the specific reputation. However, for young adults who are potentially years away from entering the workplace, consideration of how a professional community would judge their online actions is unlikely to be a pressing concern, even though the aforementioned affordances of social media mean that online actions may be viewed and judged within a professional context at any undetermined point in the future. To explore this potential conflict further, the chapter now turns to examine the use of social media by young adults, and in particular, their tendency towards expressing forms of online self-presentation and privacy behaviour that pose a risk to their professional reputation.

2.5 Young Adulthood, Social Media, and Emergent Risks

Young adults have played a prominent role in the widespread adoption of social media and, in particular, the initial success of SNSs (boyd, 2007; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012). For instance, MySpace found significant success by marketing itself to a largely teenage market, whilst both Bebo and Hyves became vastly popular with teens based in the UK and Netherlands, respectively (boyd, 2007; boyd & Ellison, 2007). Just a year after its launch in 2004, up to 90 percent of undergraduate students on US campuses were reported as using Facebook (Arrington, 2005; Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006; Stutzman, 2006), with the popularity of the site having remained relatively consistent amongst young adults throughout the following decade, despite recent indications of its decline amongst teenagers (Madden et al., 2013).

Similar trends are also noted in the UK, with around nine out of every ten 16 to 24-year-olds reporting the use of social media, and Facebook and Twitter membership reported at 98 percent and 42 percent, respectively (Ofcom, 2014; Office for National Statistics, 2014). Young adults also appear to use a variety of social media, with one US-based study finding that over half of their sample reported using two or more social media sites (Duggan et al., 2015). For instance, in addition to Facebook and Twitter, over 39 million students and

recent college graduates currently use LinkedIn, representing the site's fasted growing demographic of users (LinkedIn, 2015). Indeed, one large scale survey of 16 to 24-years-old reported that, on average, members of this cohort were registered upon 5.54 social media sites, actively using 2.82 of them for a total of 1.72 hours per day (GlobalWebIndex, 2014).

According to Christofides et al. (2009), the notion that young, or "emerging" adults engage so frequently and widely with social media should perhaps not be so surprising given that relationship formation, identity exploration, and striving for social acceptance are key markers of social life for members of this cohort (e.g. Arnett, 2000, 2004). Specifically, Erikson (1959) highlighted the "moratorium", or "free role experimentation" status of adolescence, in which individuals seek a unique space within society where recognition is of primacy, and adult commitments are postponed. More recently, a meta-analysis of studies examining identity status change during adolescence and young adulthood (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010) found that the mean proportion of individuals assigned to a "moratorium" status had risen to 19 years and then declined, leading the authors to conclude that, "*ongoing identity development should be anticipated in the years beyond late adolescence and young adulthood*." (Kroger et al., 2010, p. 696).

The proposition of a prolonged period of moratorium and identity crisis within young adulthood also has implications for impression management behaviour (Kumru & Thompson, 2003). Indeed, both Erikson (1959), and later Marcia (1966), highlighted the role of social others in assisting adolescents and young adults to construct identities, with members "*sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others*" (Erikson, 1968, p. 128). In particular, young adults in a state of crisis and focused on exploring different aspects of their identity might be expected to be highly self-monitoring, and indeed, numerous studies have shown that self-monitoring behaviour increases from early to late adolescence (Pledger, 1992), and then

decreases from this point into older adulthood, once the moratorium phase has been successfully negotiated (Erikson, 1968; Reifman, Klein, & Murphy, 1989).

With SNSs organised primarily around connecting people (boyd, 2014; boyd & Ellison, 2007), their continued popularity amongst young adults may in part be explained by the ways in which they enable identity work and public self-presentation (boyd, 2007, 2014; Livingstone, 2008). Indeed, the psychological need for self-presentation is proposed as a core motivation underpinning the use of Facebook amongst young adults (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Seidman, 2013). Similarly, boyd (2007) found that a key reason as to why the teenagers she interviewed embraced MySpace was in how it enabled them to "*write themselves into being*" (p. 129) through various design features; a finding also supported through Livingstone's (2008) interviews with teenage users of the platform.

A number of studies have found compelling support for the authenticity of online presentations upon Facebook, with Back et al. (2010), Gosling et al. (2007), and Gosling et al. (2011) finding significant positive associations between self-ratings of personality and observer ratings of participants' Facebook profiles. Similarly, Weisbuch, Ivcevic, and Ambady (2009) found a significant correspondence between first impressions formed from observations of "real world" behaviour and those formed from Facebook, with ratings of likability seemingly crossing over from offline to online contexts through social expressivity and verbal self-disclosures. Wilson et al. (2012) propose that in the specific context of Facebook, users may present themselves authentically because friends within their network tend to be known offline (Lampe et al., 2006; C. Ross et al., 2009), and would therefore be able to detect any inaccurate or embellished information disclosed online (Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009).

Nevertheless, a number of researchers have explored how individual differences in personality may explain variation in how young adults engage in self-presentation on Facebook. For instance, in comparison to their more

introverted counterparts, extraverted young adults have been found to indicate higher levels of social media activity (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zuniga, 2010; Gosling et al., 2011; Ong et al., 2011; Seidman, 2013) and self-disclose more readily (Bibby, 2008; Ong et al., 2011), in addition to possessing larger network sizes (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010) and belonging to more online groups (C. Ross et al., 2009). Additionally, Bibby (2008) and Seidman (2013) found that conscientiousness was positively associated with young adults engaging in more cautious self-presentation, including avoiding behaviours not typically associated with a hard working image, such as using social media to seek information about leisure pursuits.

Supporting the previous findings of Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel, and Fox (2002), Seidman (2013) found a positive association between young adult expression of their "real" actual self upon Facebook and the traits of neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion, while the expression of ideal aspects of self was positively related to neuroticism. In accordance with the findings of C. Ross et al. (2009), Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010), and Winter et al. (2014) found that young adults with higher neuroticism tend to share deeper, more personally-identifying self-disclosures on Facebook, while Seidman (2013) suggests that Facebook may be perceived as representing a "safe place" (p. 406) for highly neurotic individuals to publicly disclose both actual and ideal aspects of their self.

However, in freely disclosing personal information and engaging in authentic self-expression on social media, young adults face the risk that a professional audience will judge their online actions unfavourably, potentially damaging their professional reputation and employability. The chapter now turns to outline research that has examined the professionally risky behaviour of young adults upon social media, and the potential factors influencing its expression.

2.5.1 Professionally Risky Behaviour and Social Media

A number of reviews have emphasised the tendency for young adults to engage more frequently in risky behaviour than either children or more mature adults (e.g. Emler & Reicher, 1995; Reyna & Farley, 2006; Steinberg, 2008), identifying them as "*a normative sample of people for whom risk taking is a preoccupation of daily life*" (Reyna & Rivers, 2008, p. 2). In particular, Steinberg (2007, 2010) argues that the proclivity towards reward-seeking and impulsiveness amongst adolescents contributes towards the consistent pattern of risky decision making found amongst members of the cohort in relation to a wide range of risk taking behaviours, including smoking, crime, alcohol and drug misuse, driving, and exercise (Reyna & Farley, 2006, p. 3).

In addition to the role of impulsiveness, a meta-analysis of 150 studies conducted by Byrnes, Miller, and Schafer (1999) also found an effect of gender, with males engaging in greater risk taking behaviour than females. However, this was found to reduce with age and vary depending on specific type of risk. Indeed, recent research has suggested that patterns of risky behaviour across the broader life span may be domain specific, with Rolison et al. (2013) finding that risk taking related to recreational activities reduces steeply from young adulthood to middle age, whereas reductions in ethical and health risk taking is more gradual and risky behaviour within the social domain actually increases slightly beyond young adulthood.

Though still an emergent body of literature, a number of studies have investigated the risk taking behaviour of young adults within the domain of social media. For instance, Peluchette and Karl (2007) analysed over 200 Facebook profiles and found that around half featured the use of profanity and photos depicting partying and the use of alcohol, while two-fifths involved negative comments about others, and one-quarter involved derogatory comments about employers and semi-nude or sexually provocative photos. Similar trends were reported by Karl, Peluchette, and Schlaegel (2010), who also found cultural differences between the risky online behaviour of German and

US-based students, with the latter reporting significantly more frequent engagement with posting about religious beliefs, use of alcohol, political affiliations, and comments about sexual activities.

Studies of online regret have also hinted at the prevalence of risky self-disclosures on social media within this cohort. In particular, Y. Wang et al. (2011) identified three specific forms of regretted post on Facebook: first, those that involved the self-disclosure of "sensitive content", such as depictions of alcohol and illegal drug use, sex, religion and politics, profanity and obscenity, personal and family issues, and work-related topics; second, content conveying strong sentiment, including negative or offensive comments, and arguments; and third, posts involving lies or the disclosure of secrets. Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al. (2013) also reported similar types of regret in the context of Twitter, with users self-reporting issues relating to revealing too much or "over-sharing", directly criticising specific others, expressing emotion, and making erroneous claims in online conversations.

In addition to posting risky content, a number of studies have indicated that young adults often either struggle to fully understand the complexities of their privacy settings (Debatin et al., 2009) or tend to rely on the default public settings (e.g. Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Gross & Acquisti, 2005). As demonstrated by Krishnamurthy and Wills (2008) in an analysis of more than 67,000 Twitter profiles, over 99 percent of users were found to have left their accounts on the default setting of public availability. Extending their analysis to Facebook profiles, Krishnamurthy and Wills (2008) also found that just over half of approximately 2.5 million profiles based in London and three-quarters of 98 thousand profiles based in Edinburgh had been left open and accessible to the public. Additionally, even when young adults do restrict their Facebook profiles, they have been found to continue posting risky content and fail to fully verify people accepted into their networks (R. Miller et al., 2010; Tufekci, 2008).

Indeed, a number of contradictions are apparent in the risky online behaviour of young adults. For instance, Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al. (2013)

indicated that a key source of awareness with respect to regretful behaviour upon Twitter was through the self-realisation of having shared too much information or been too critical, suggesting that their participants possessed some degree of knowledge about potential risks associated with their online behaviour. Additionally, Kawase, Nunes, Herder, Nejdl, and Casanova (2013) found that even when Twitter users were alerted to professional risky content upon their profile and subsequently indicated an intention to delete it, less than half actually did so. The notion that young adults seem to be aware of the reputational risks associated with particular behaviours, and yet nevertheless continue to express them or allow them to remain visible has subsequently been described by R. Miller et al. (2010) as the "posting paradox". The following section now addresses a range of propositions as to why this apparent contradiction may be especially prevalent amongst young adults yet to enter the workplace.

2.5.2 Potential Risk Factors

The question of why the noted paradox should occur amongst young adults yet to complete the college-to-work transition appears to have received limited empirical research to date, although the preceding literatures on social identity and reputation management discussed in this chapter present a variety of propositions. In particular, the social identity perspective suggests that students may encounter issues with regards to forming "professionally appropriate" in-group prototypes on which to base expectations of socially normative online behaviour (Hogg & Terry, 2000). As highlighted by the preceding discussion of social recruiting (see Section 2.4.6), the failure to conform to professional expectations of social media use is the fundamental basis of risk to professional reputation within this domain. Whilst young adults appear to be aware to some extent of the need to control particular online behaviours, it is not clear as to whether this is necessarily in relation to professional reputation or a more general desire to be judged in socially desirable terms.

Alternatively, the paradox may occur not because of a lack of awareness of professional norms, but rather because young adults yet to enter the workplace do not perceive a salient need to convey aspects of professional identity upon social media. For instance, Peluchette and Karl (2009) found that in comparison to students wanting to be viewed as wild, sexually appealing, or offensive, those wishing to adopt social identities that emphasised a hard-working and intelligent image were less likely to post inappropriate content and more likely to be comfortable with allowing employers to view their profile. Relatedly, Y. Wang et al. (2011) also found that regretful tweets occurred not simply as a result of misjudged audiences or through a lack of foresight, but as intentional acts designed to convey a "cool" and "funny" image online. Indeed, parallels may be drawn here with Emler and Reicher's (1995) thesis that adolescent delinquency is influenced by the desire of young adults to cultivate this particular type of social identity, regardless of prevailing social norms.

Relatedly, the perceived presence of professional audience may also influence the salience of professional identity for young adults using social media. For instance, R. Miller et al. (2010) found that students further away from graduation reported feeling less comfortable with the possibility of employers accessing their profile than those in their final year, primarily due to having tailored their online self-presentation for the benefit of friends rather than prospective employers. In a follow-up study, R. Miller, Salmona, and Melton (2012) subsequently found that student self-identification with "being on the job market" predicted concern for online professional image regardless of proximity to graduation, leading the authors to speculate that this may have been due to the perceived closeness of professional audience.

Building upon the preceding discussion of individual differences, personality may also represent a potential factor influencing the risky behaviour of young adults on social media. For instance, some of factors identified by Wang et al (2011) and Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al. (2013) as influencing regretful posts appeared to reflect potential roles of conscientiousness, impulsivity, and

emotional stability. Similarly, a number of the Five Factor Model (FFM: Costa & McCrae, 1992a) personality domains have been found to predict self-disclosure behaviours upon social media (e.g. Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Bibby, 2008; Ong et al., 2011; C. Ross et al., 2009; Seidman, 2013) and the level of regret associated with posting "inappropriate content" (Moore & McElroy, 2012). Perhaps most promisingly, Karl et al. (2010) found that low levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability were predictive of the likelihood of sharing inappropriate posts, or "faux pas", upon Facebook, such as depictions of alcohol use, sexually provocative images, and illegal drug taking.

A fourth proposition builds upon the preceding discussion of impression management strategies (see Section 2.3.1) and digital reputation management behaviours (see Section 2.4). Specifically, young adults may lack sufficient levels of skill required to successfully prevent or respond to the expression of professionally risky behaviour on social media. However, some findings appear to contradict this proposition. For instance, Madden (2012) found that most young adults reported using a range of reputation management behaviours, including deleting unwanted comments left by others, removing name "tags" from photos, and deleting connections in order to "prune" their profiles. Additionally, the study found that two-thirds of the respondents reported using search engines to monitor their digital footprints, albeit on a relatively infrequent basis.

This section has outlined a number of factors that may play a role in explaining the seemingly paradoxical finding that young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media despite being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. More broadly, this chapter has presented findings from a range of disciplines that have emphasised the impact of social media on the employability of young adults. However, as a relatively nascent area of research, many of the propositions outlined with respect to the professionally risky behaviour of young adults on social media have received only limited empirical attention in the literature to date. As such,

the research objective guiding the empirical research presented in this thesis is as follows:

> **RO:** *Why do young adults approaching the college-to-work transition engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media, despite seemingly being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences?*

To examine this objective, five sets of research questions were developed in order to address gaps identified within the literature and develop a rich and detailed understanding of why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media. These are now outlined in the following section.

2.6 Literature Gaps and Research Questions

In order to explore the behaviour of young adults, Study 1 of this thesis addresses the need to conceptualise "professional risk" in relation to social media. Studies have characterised risky behaviour in various ways, including in terms of the public disclosure of personally intimate information (e.g. Christofides et al., 2009; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Tufekci, 2008), the expression of behaviours "typical" of college-aged young adults (e.g. Karl et al., 2010; Peluchette & Karl, 2008; Peluchette & Karl, 2009), and engagement in behaviours deemed to be professionally inappropriate by the recruiters who use social media to vet job applicants (e.g. R. Miller & Melton, 2015; Root & McKay, 2014).

The latter of these perspectives is particularly relevant to the focus of the research objective underpinning this thesis, but most of the related research has conceptualised professional risk on the basis of a body of literature consisting almost exclusively of industry-based reports of social recruiting (e.g. CareerBuilder, 2012; Cross-Tab, 2010; Jobvite, 2014b; Reppler, 2011). A key limitation of these studies is that it is largely unclear as to how measures of professionally risky behaviour were constructed, or how, if at all, assumptions

were tested. Therefore, the guiding rationale for Study 1 was to construct a conceptual framework of professionally risky behaviour, grounded in the organisational perspectives conveyed through social media policies for employees. In particular, documented guidance on "professionally appropriate" behaviours may convey particular organisational expectations of the "type" of person likely to encounter professional risk. The core research question underpinning Study 1 was therefore:

> **RQ_1:** *What attributes do organisations expect of their employees in order for them to successfully manage risk to professional reputation when using social media?*

Building upon the organisational interpretation of professional risk examined by **RQ_1**, the core rationale underpinning Study 2 was to further examine the construct from the perspective of employees to whom the social media policies apply. A number of studies have explored the use of social media from the perspective of employees (e.g. J. M. DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Lampinen et al., 2009; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Wu, DiMicco, & Millen, 2010), although most have focused upon experiences within large, "tech-savvy" commercial enterprises such as IBM (e.g. J. DiMicco et al., 2008; J. M. DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Ehrlich & Shami, 2010; Wu et al., 2010) and Microsoft (e.g. Archambault & Grudin, 2012; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Zhang, De Choudhury, & Grudin, 2014).

Study 2 focuses specifically upon the experiences of academic and professional services employees within a single Higher Education Institution (HEI). Universities present a particularly suitable context in which to study the perceptions and management of professional risk upon social media, given the complex and multi-faceted nature of their organisational objectives as both a commercial enterprise and provider of education (e.g. Whitchurch, 2006; Whitchurch, 2007) and the central role of social media in the student experience (Kent & Leaver, 2014; Selwyn, 2009). Subsequently, university employees may

encounter reputational risk on social media in relation to a range of work-related audiences, and as such, the first research question of Study 2 was:

> **RQ_{2a}:** *How do employees understand and define professionally risky interactions with, and upon, social media?*

Additionally, Study 2 also investigated the reputation management strategies adopted to manage professional risk. In particular, there is a need to understand both the mental and behavioural strategies used by employees to manage professional risk (e.g. Lampinen et al., 2009), and their respective effectiveness. Specifically, rather than imposing a limit on the types of social media discussed by interviewees, the study adopts an open-ended approach similar to that of Skeels and Grudin (2009) and Zhang et al. (2014), where participants were encouraged to discuss their own personal "ecology" of social media sites. Subsequently, the second research question addressed in Study 2 was:

> **RQ_{2b}:** *How do employees manage risk to professional reputation across their social media ecologies?*

With the first two studies providing a conceptual framework of professional risk and the strategies used to manage it upon social media, the remaining three empirical studies examined the perceptions and experiences of young adults using the technology before, during, and following the college-to-work transition. Following from the core findings of Studies 1 and 2, and the preceding discussion of potential factors influencing professionally risky behaviour within this chapter, the rationale of Study 3 was to investigate the respective roles of individual differences and situational context in the extent to which students considered the professional consequences of their actions when using Facebook and Twitter.

The first research question of Study 3 related to research that has identified the role of individual differences in conscientiousness, impulsiveness, agreeableness, self-monitoring, and neuroticism, and their prediction of self-

disclosure and regretted posting behaviours upon social media (e.g. Abell & Brewer, 2014; Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Karl et al., 2010; Moore & McElroy, 2012; Seidman, 2013; Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al., 2013; Y. Wang et al., 2011). Therefore, the research question addressed was:

> **RQ$_{3a}$:** *Do individual differences in personality affect the extent to which young adults approaching the college-to-work transition consider the professional consequences of their actions on social media?*

Though numerous studies have found a range of associations between individual differences in personality and social media behaviour, others have reported mixed findings, subsequently concluding that "*personality defined by the Five-Factor approach may be too broad and not be the best way to understand specific Internet behaviours*" (C. Ross et al., 2009, p. 582). Subsequently, a number of measures were developed and used within Study 3 that reflected approaches to self-regulating interactions with social media. The second research question of Study 3 was therefore:

> **RQ$_{3b}$:** *Do individual differences in the self-regulation of social media use affect the extent to which young adults approaching the college-to-work transition consider the professional consequences of their actions?*

In addition to the potential roles of individual differences in personality and self-regulation of social media use, the social identity and impression management research reviewed within this chapter underscored the importance of the perceived salience and social presence of audiences in influencing contextually appropriate behaviours. Addressing the proposition that this may play a role in influencing the professionally risky behaviour of students, the third research question addressed in Study 3 was:

> **RQ$_{3c}$:** *Does temporal distance to graduation affect the extent to which young adults approaching the college-to-work transition consider their professional reputation on social media?*

Following primarily from the core findings of Study 3, but also building upon the tentative findings and untested hypotheses of Miller and colleagues (R. Miller et al., 2010; R. Miller et al., 2012), Study 4 examined the respective roles of two potential factors influencing perceptions of professionally risky behaviour amongst job seeking, final year undergraduates. The first related to whether the immediacy of intentions to start applying for jobs had an effect on perceptions of professional risk, given that doing so may involve considering professional audience online. Thus, the first research question addressed in Study 4 was:

> **RQ$_{4a}$**: *Do intentions to start actively applying for jobs influence how young adults in their final year of undergraduate study perceive professional risk upon Facebook?*

The second research question examined in Study 4 reflected a theoretical perspective that emerged from the findings of Study 3, and therefore has yet to be addressed within this chapter so to maintain a clear narrative. Discussed in greater detail within Chapter 7, the construal-level theory of psychological distance (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2010) has provided a theoretical framework in which risk perception and subsequent intentions to engage in prevention behaviours have been predicted across a range of risk contexts, from health (Chandran & Menon, 2004) to climate change (Spence, Poortinga, & Pidgeon, 2012). Examining whether this robust conceptual relationship could be extended to the context of professional risk on social media, the second research question of Study 4 was:

> **RQ$_{4b}$**: *Does the psychological distance of employer surveillance influence how young adults in their final year of undergraduate study perceive professional risk upon Facebook?*

An additional factor potentially contributing to why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour on Facebook relates to its perception as a "safer", more private space for social interaction (e.g. Tufekci, 2008). To examine the potential psychological basis for why this may be, the third research question examined in Study 4 was:

RQ$_{4c}$: *Does level of trust in Facebook privacy settings influence how young adults in their final year of undergraduate study perceive the psychological distance of employers looking at their profile?*

Study 5 extended the focus of thesis upon understanding the professionally risky behaviour of young adults to graduates and year-in-industry interns that had recently made the college-to-work transition. In particular, the first research question followed from the findings of Study 4 in seeking to identify types of incident occurring across organisational entry that lead young adults to consider professional risk upon social media. Subsequently, the first research question addressed in Study 5 was:

RQ$_{5a}$: *What types of events lead young adults to consider risk to their professional reputation when using social media during the college-to-work transition?*

As discussed within this chapter, a number of studies have indicated that young adults are familiar with using digital reputation management strategies (Jobvite, 2014a; Madden, 2012; Madden & Smith, 2010), though how these strategies might differ across platforms or be used in response to particular types of incident are less clear. Therefore, the second research question addressed in Study 5 was:

RQ$_{5b}$: *What types of digital reputation management strategies do young adults engage in upon social media in order to address professionally risky incidents?*

In recent years, a number of digital reputation management systems (DRMSs) have been developed with the aim of helping users to manage professional risk online. At present, however, there is limited indication of whether such systems are being utilised by young adults, and if so, whether the feedback they present is useful and relevant. Therefore, the third research question examined by Study 5 was:

RQ_{5c}: *How useful are digital reputation management systems in helping young adult users to identify and manage risk to professional reputation upon social media?*

2.7 Summary

The current chapter has outlined the core theoretical foundations upon which this thesis is based. A social psychological perspective has been presented in which identity is conceptualised as the dynamic product of a reflexive social cognitive system, with individuals self-regulating their behaviour on the basis of perceived standards and norms derived from social comparisons with relevant others. The chapter has also presented perspectives from within the social psychological literatures that emphasise the role of social context in influencing the adoption and presentation of particular aspects of social identity. On the basis of this work, the current thesis conceives identity as a multifaceted, dynamic, and continuously evolving project, presented in varying ways to different audiences through an on-going process of self-regulation and use of impression management strategies.

This chapter also emphasised the various ways in which social media contributes to the complexity of self-presentation and reputation management amongst young adults online. In particular, the chapter has outlined how the increasingly prevalent use of social media by employers to inform recruitment and selection decisions poses significant threats to the employability of young adult users, not only by progressively eroding boundaries between personal and professional social spheres, but in blurring temporal boundaries between past, present, and future online behaviours. Related work has been reviewed that investigates self-presentation and risky behaviour amongst young adults users of social media, with an outline provided of some of the key factors that may explain why members of this cohort appear to engage in professionally inappropriate behaviours when using the technology, despite seemingly being aware of the negative reputational consequences.

The forthcoming empirical chapters seek to address gaps in the literatures by first unpacking the concept of professional risk upon social media, and then addressing the respective explanatory power of each of the discussed factors in influencing the expression of professionally risky behaviour by young adults whilst approaching the college-to-work transition. Part II of this thesis now outlines the specific methodological approach adopted to address the overarching research question of why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media.

PART II

METHODOLOGY

3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the pragmatic, mixed method approach adopted in the current thesis to address the overarching research question of why young adults approaching the college-to-work transition engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media, despite being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. The chapter details the rationale for adopting this approach with respect to the relevant literatures on social identity, impression management, and digital reputation management, and then discusses the importance of taking a person-centred approach to social media research ethics. The following section first outlines the rationale for focusing on students as a representative sample of young adults.

3.2 Sampling Students as Representatives of Young Adults

The previous chapter outlined how three of the five empirical studies presented in this thesis utilise samples of full-time students and recent graduates to examine the core research objective. In doing so, the studies are aligned with the majority of social psychological research, in which undergraduates samples are common and feature as prominently as in as many as two-thirds to four-fifths of studies conducted within the domain (Buchanan & Smith, 1999; Wintre, North, & Sugar, 2001). Some researchers, such as Sears (1986), have expressed concern for a "narrow data base" effect subsequently created by the overrepresentation of undergraduate student samples in social psychological research, and the conclusions that are drawn from them with regards to social behaviour.

However, the prevalence of student samples within social media research is not simply indicative of convenience sampling but rather, reflects attempts to understand the online behaviour of a key demographic of users. As discussed previously in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.5), nine out of ten UK-based 16 to 24-year-olds report using social media (Office for National Statistics, 2014), and maintain profiles across over five platforms, on average (GlobalWebIndex, 2014). Indeed, with almost three-quarters of 16 to 18-year-olds enrolled in full-time further education (Department for Education, 2014), almost 2.3 million young adults studying on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the 2013-14 academic year (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015), and vacancies increasing steadily for the top graduate employers (High Fliers, 2015), students and graduates represent a particularly sizable proportion of young adults in the UK for whom social media appears inextricably interwoven into their everyday experience (e.g. Ellison et al., 2007; Kent & Leaver, 2014; Selwyn, 2009).

In addressing the main research objective of this thesis, the empirical research conducted in Studies 3, 4, and 5 used samples of students and recent graduates predominantly affiliated with relatively high-achieving Further and Higher Education Institutions. In particular, Russell Group universities were particularly well represented, where the member organisations are "*24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector*" (Russell Group, 2015). Similarly, the graduate trainees and year-in-industry interns sampled in Study 5 were opportunistically sampled from a range of sectors, but also shared the commonality of either working towards or having already achieved degrees from top-tier universities, and had all successfully negotiated the highly competitive recruitment drive of their respective graduate scheme.

The core implication of this point is that the empirical findings presented throughout the forthcoming chapters may be representative of the many young adults enrolled within full-time education, but particularly so of those provided

with greater resources and most likely destined for professional job roles upon graduation in which higher education level qualifications are typically required. Whilst this may represent a limitation with regards to capturing the broad spectrum of potential careers that young adults are able to embrace, as Study 1 outlines in its analysis of social media policies (see Chapter 4), it is within professional sectors that social media appear to pose the greatest challenges to employers and employees alike. Therefore, students and recent graduates appear to represent both relevant and important sub-populations of young adults for studying the potential factors that influence professionally risky behaviour when using social media.

3.3 Mixed Method Research Approach

The current thesis adopts a pragmatic approach to addressing the research objective of this thesis, shifting sequentially between inductive and deductive modes of inquiry to examine the professionally risky behaviour of young adults using social media, the factors influencing its expression, and the behavioural strategies adopted by users to manage it. In doing so, the empirical studies presented draw upon both quantitative and qualitative methods, not simply as a form of "multi-strategy research" where the distinct paradigms are poorly aligned (Bryman, 2006) or integrated throughout analysis (Bryman, 2007), but as part of a specific mixed method research approach.

Mixed methods research (MMR) has been labelled as a distinct "third methodological movement" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011), or "third research paradigm" (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007), following considerable debate surrounding the combination of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms, and the respective ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that distinguish them (Howe, 1988). Specifically, as the most dominant methodological orientation within the psychological sciences for much of the 20th century (Morgan, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), the quantitative paradigm has primarily been associated with the positivist tradition where the

natural sciences methodology of 'objective' empirical research, hypotheses testing, and quantitative measurement dominate (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

Ontologically, positivists position reality as existing independently of human perception, and therefore, epistemologically, "*the investigator and investigated are independent entities*" (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002, p. 44), with the latter accessible for objective study. However, more recently post-positivist philosophies such as critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975; Collier, 1994) have presented their critiques of what has been described as a "crude", or "naïve", positivist paradigm (Morgan, 2007) by maintaining a realist ontological perspective whilst critically acknowledging the epistemological fallibility of human observation. Conversely, the latter stages of the 20th century have seen the rise of the qualitative paradigm throughout the social sciences, defined by Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p. 6) as involving "*techniques associated with the gathering, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of narrative information*."

In contrast to the positivist orientation dominating quantitative research, Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative researchers as typically subscribing to some form of constructivism where ontologically, reality is interpreted as a social construction and subsequently, multiple realities are held to exist. Epistemologically, Guba and Lincoln (1994) further characterise the paradigm through the perspective that there can be no access to reality independent of individuals' minds and therefore, investigators become intimately linked with their object of study, meaning that the interpretation of findings is always a reflexive process. According to Sale et al. (2002), the distinctions between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms further extend beyond these philosophical and methodological considerations into more practical consequences, including the publication and funding of research.

Due to the proposed ontological and epistemological distinctions between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, there has been substantial debate with respect to the appropriateness of combining them within research

studies (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Howe (1988, p. 12) identifies those dismissing the combination of paradigms due to their irreconcilable epistemological and methodological differences (e.g. Guba, 1987) as proponents of the "incompatibility thesis", and therefore in direct contrast to the perspective of "compatibilism", in which the pragmatic philosophies of James, Dewey, Putnam, and Rorty are embraced and the notion of "what works" placed at the forefront of inquiry (Howe, 1988). Indeed, proponents of MMR have argued for the methodological compatibility of the quantitative and qualitative paradigms (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011), reflecting an approach based more on pragmatism than a dogmatic adherence to either side of the quantitative-qualitative debate (Morgan, 2007).

A core element of MMR, therefore, is the notion of "methodological eclecticism" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011); a term defined by Hammersley (1996, p. 167) as "*the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods … on the ground that this promises to cancel out the respective weaknesses of each method*." This point is emphasised in Johnson *et al*'s (2007, p. 123) definition of MMR, where the authors propose that,

> "*Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.*"

By combining methodological approaches in such a way, it is argued that the analysis of a particular phenomenon is strengthened; a notion termed as triangulation (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), or "*the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon*" (Denzin, 1978, p. 291). In this sense, triangulation refers not only to the use of different methods to address the same research problem or phenomenon, but also to the use of various sources to collect data, and the application of multiple theoretical frameworks to interpret results (Denzin, 1978). Nevertheless, triangulation represents just one of

numerous reasons for using mixed methods, ranging from the production of richer data and greater creativity in its collection, to greater integration of theories, wider expansion of inquiry, developing scale-based instruments, and an increased potential for uncovering contradictions in the data collected (Bryman, 2006; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Jick, 1979; Johnson et al., 2007).

Various classifications of mixed method research designs have been proposed (e.g. Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003; Greene et al., 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998), though most relevant to the approach adopted in this thesis are the explanatory and exploratory designs, with both consisting of two-phases but differing with respect to the transition between quantitative-to-qualitative and qualitative-to-quantitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Specifically, explanatory designs use qualitative data to explain or build upon quantitative findings (Creswell et al., 2003), whilst in contrast, exploratory designs use qualitative data within the initial phase to inform the subsequent exploration of a phenomenon; particularly in situations where key variables are unknown or measures are yet to be developed (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Creswell et al., 2003).

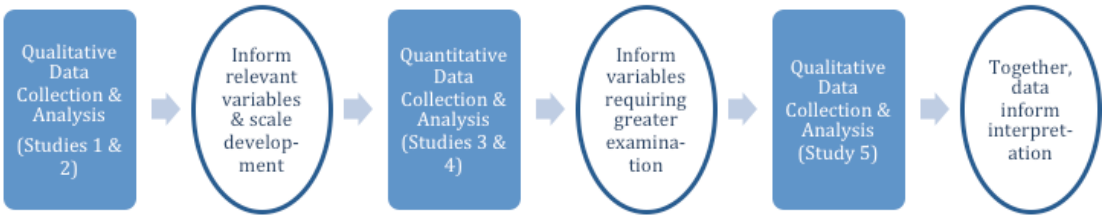


Figure 2. Explanatory-Exploratory Sequential Design of the Mixed Methods Approach

As illustrated by Figure 2, the empirical studies presented in the current thesis cycle sequentially between both of these exploratory and explanatory research designs. First, Studies 1 and 2 draw upon inductive inquiry and the

qualitative methods of document analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the construct of professionally risky behaviour on social media from the perspectives of employers and current employees, respectively. Second, Studies 3 and 4 adopt a more deductive, quantitative mode of inquiry, using online surveys to examine the potential roles of individual differences in personality and psychological distance in influencing the perception and management of professional risk amongst young adults using social media.

Third, and finally, Study 5 returns to an explanatory approach, combining semi-structured interviews with the critical incident technique (CIT: Flanagan, 1954) and think-aloud protocol (TAP: Ericsson & Simon, 1998) to identify the types of incident that lead young adults to perceive risk to professional reputation when using social media during organisational entry, and evaluate the utility of the Reppler (2015) and Persona (2015) digital reputation management systems (DRMSs). As argued previously, the mixed-methods approach adopted in this thesis is not simply a disparate collection of methods but rather, a sequential flow of exploratory and explanatory designs which utilise the benefits of both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms (e.g. Greene et al., 1989).

In doing so, the empirical research presented in this thesis embraces the MMR notions of methodological eclecticism, paradigmatic pluralism, and an iterative, cyclical approach to addressing the research objective of this thesis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). The philosophical position of pragmatism is central to MMR and also throughout the current thesis, in which there is "*a focus on the research question (or research problem) in determining the methods/approaches employed within any given study*" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011, p. 288). More specifically, the thesis adopts a philosophical position of pragmatic realism (e.g. Putnam, 1990) where ontologically, reality is held as existing independently of individuals, but draws influence from James' and Dewey's interpretations of pragmatism in which phenomena of interest can be

investigated through the empirical study of the interaction between the individual and the world.

Epistemologically, the perspective adopted in the current thesis reflects the wider philosophical shift towards a "postpositivistic era" of scientific inquiry (Howe, 1988, p. 15) in a number of respects. First, with both the qualitative and quantitative empirical data being collected through methods of self-report, the subsequent interpretations of reality are necessarily fallible, and for this reason, are interpreted in relation to the experiential strata of the "real" (e.g. Bhaskar, 1975). Second, it is also acknowledged that the analysis presented throughout the thesis is to some extent "theory-laden" (Moutinho & Hutcheson, 2011, p. 2) and, therefore, biased to some extent by researcher perceptions and interpretations of reality. Third, it is acknowledged that the social phenomenon of professionally risky behaviour on social media is not a fixed aspect of reality but transient and dynamic, reflexively evolving with changes in the technology over time.

The specific methods used in the five empirical studies presented in this thesis are now outlined in more detail in the following sections.

3.3.1 Document Analysis

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that there is barely an activity in modern day life that fails to leave a material trail, and with highly persistent and visible nature of social media data, this appears to have become particularly indicative of social interaction across the digital society (e.g. boyd, 2014; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). Social media researchers are subsequently presented with the unique opportunity to examine artefacts such as policy and guideline documents, in which social concepts such as social norms and expectations of behaviour may be instantiated. In particular, Study 1 (see Chapter 4) adopts the method of document analysis (Hodder, 2000) to examine thirty organisational social media policies designed for company employees using the technology. According to May (1997, pp. 157 - 158), documents can be interpreted as,

> *"the sedimentation of social practices…* [they] *tell us about the aspirations and intentions of the period to which they refer and describe places and social relationships at a time when we were simply not present"*

Though similar aspects of information could be accessed through alternative methods, such as directly interviewing appropriate stakeholders working in relevant human resources or senior management positions, social media policy documents tend to be widely accessible and represent clear outlines of organisational expectations of professionally "appropriate" and "inappropriate" social media use, and therefore, the character of professional risk within this context. However, it is acknowledged that whilst policies may reflect the formal stance of the organisation regarding employee use of social media, they may not necessarily represent actual practice. For this reason, Study 2 (see Chapter 5) and Study 5 (see Chapter 8) of this thesis also examine perceptions of professional risk from the perspective of employees, to whom the types of policies analysed in Study 1 apply.

According to Prior (2008), the prevailing perspective throughout social sciences research is that documents are to be considered as "*mute evidence* [that can] *be separated across space and time from its author, producer and user*" (Hodder, 2000, p. 703) or "*simply 'out there' waiting to be assembled and analysed* [and] *non-reactive*" (Bryman, 2004, p. 370). In focusing on the content of the policies, rather than their use and function (Prior, 2008), it is acknowledged that the researcher plays an active role in the interpretation and classification of codes and themes across the documents. Thus, whilst these themes are taken to represent noteworthy consistencies in the attributes that organisations expect their employees to exhibit when using social media, it is acknowledged that this interpretation is informed by moving between inductive and deductive modes of analyses. Indeed, specific qualitative methods of inquiry used as part of a document analysis can vary depending on the epistemological stance of the researcher (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2008), and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is used in Study 1 not only because of its pragmatic

applications and integration with other methods, but due to its rigour in identifying themes across datasets.

3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview is a qualitative method most readily characterised by an interviewer covering a set number of topics and themes with each interviewee, though with elements of flexibility and fluidity in terms of the sequence in which the related questions are asked and subsequently followed up (Mason, 2004). The method is used at two distinct points in this thesis, albeit in slightly different ways. In the first instance, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used in Study 2 (see Chapter 5) to explore how university employees perceive and manage professionally risky behaviour whilst using social media to support their professional activity. In particular, the 14 interview sessions covered a consistent set of themes, with some latitude for following up and further exploring any points of interest as they arose.

Semi-structured interviews were also used in Study 5 (see Chapter 8), where 20 recently employed graduates and year-in-industry interns were asked to recall incidents in which they considered risk to their professional reputation whilst using social media during the college-to-work transition. In particular, the critical incident technique (CIT: Flanagan, 1954) was used to identify both antecedents of considering professional risk, and consequences in the form of reputation management strategies. Additionally, the think-aloud protocol (TAP: Ericsson & Simon, 1998) method was used as the basis for examining the utility of two digital reputation management systems (DRMSs), Reppler (2015) and Persona (2015), whereby interviewees were prompted to verbalise their thought processes as they identified professionally risky content via the interfaces of the two systems.

A key benefit of using semi-structured interviews is its flexibility in enabling further exploration of incidents or events relating to a particular phenomenon, thus presenting the opportunity for collecting rich, qualitative data. However, these experiences are subject to both deliberate and non-

deliberate distortions, and potentially even omitted entirely if, for instance, they might be interpreted as being socially undesirable (Farrall, 2009). This could have potentially been an issue in both Studies 2 and 5 of this thesis where interviewees were asked to describe their experiences of managing professional risk whilst using social media. However, as conveyed by the findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 8, many interviewees still disclosed the details of experiences in which their own use of social media had posed risks to their professional reputation.

3.3.3 Online Surveys

The survey method has been used widely as a means for examining how individuals interact with social media (e.g. Binder et al., 2009; Hughes, Rowe, Batey, & Lee, 2012; Joinson, 2008; Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al., 2013; Y. Wang et al., 2011). In particular, online surveys feature a range of advantages, including saving significant amounts of time in dissemination and digitalising responses following collection, increasing reach, and saving money from the printing and postage costs associated with mailing questionnaires to participants (Wright, 2005). Additionally, online surveys can be useful for targeting populations with specific characteristics; a point that was particularly important in this thesis, where young adult users of social media were primarily targeted. Indeed, according to Van Selm and Jankowski (2006) online surveys have been found to be both appealing to young people and relevant for studying Internet-based phenomena.

However, it is also important to outline some of the limitations of the method. Self-selection bias is a major limitation of online survey research (Wright, 2005), and it is possible that the types of student volunteering to participate in Studies 3 and 4 may have also possessed characteristics typically associated with a lower likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour. Relatedly, the framing of information and presentational order of measures within surveys can create demand characteristics, and responses may reflect a social desirability bias for measures relating to socially sensitive topics, such as professionally

risky behaviour. Whilst acknowledging these limitations, steps were taken in Studies 3 and 4 in an attempt to mitigate the effects, such as reassuring participants of the anonymity of their responses and carefully considering the specific order in which survey items were presented.

In Study 3, the online survey method was used to examine the respective roles of individual differences in personality, self-regulatory interactions with social media, and proximity to organisational entry in predicting the consideration of professional consequences and profile modification strategies adopted by students using Facebook and Twitter. This approach was in line with numerous studies to have used online surveys to examine the effect of individual differences in personality on self-presentation behaviour upon social media (e.g. Carpenter, Green, & LaFlam, 2011; C. Ross et al., 2009; Seidman, 2013). Additionally, the survey method enabled measures to be developed for the specific purpose of the study, informed by both the qualitative findings of Studies 1 and 2, and established measures of self-presentation and impression management from the related literature (e.g. Bolino & Turnley, 1999; Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011).

Study 4 also used the online survey method to examine the relationship between psychological distance of professional audience upon Facebook and perceptions of professional risk upon the site. The reach of the online survey method enabled final year undergraduate students to be recruited from over sixty UK-based higher education institutions (HEIs), though primarily from the University of Nottingham. With no established measures of either psychological distance or professional risky behaviour available in the context of social media, a similar approach to Study 3 was adopted in which measures were developed for the purpose of the research, following the guidelines set out by Hinkin (1998) for scale development. In particular, the psychological distance measure adapted items from Spence and colleagues' (2012) study of the psychological distance of climate change and risk perception, while short vignettes were

developed to measure professionally risky behaviour on Facebook, with real-life cases used as the basis for the risky content.

The methods implemented as part of the mixed method approach described throughout this chapter were selected on the basis of the specific research questions being examined. However, designing research studies that examine the use of social media by individuals requires careful consideration of the specific ethical issues posed the technology. The following section now turns to outline these issues, and how they were addressed in the current thesis.

3.4 Social Media Research Ethics

The empirical research conducted in this thesis adopted a "person-centred" approach to social media research ethics, in which all human participants were asked for informed consent, were debriefed with regards to the nature of the studies, and were afforded the opportunity to withdraw their participation if they wished to do so. Initially developed within the context of biomedical research, the core principles of research ethics and the ethical treatment of persons have been represented throughout a number of landmark policies and guidelines, including the Nuremberg Code, the Declaration of Helsinki, the National Research Act of 1974, and the Belmont Report. As outlined by Markham and Buchanan (2012, p. 4),

> "*the basic tenets shared by these policies include the fundamental rights of human dignity, autonomy, protection, safety, maximization of benefits and minimization of harms, or, in the most recent accepted phrasing, respect for persons, justice and beneficence*." (p. 4).

Indeed, these principles have been further instantiated through discipline-based guidelines, including the Association for Computing Machinery's (ACM, 1992) "Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct" and the British Psychological Society's "Code of Human Research Ethics" (BPS: Oates, Kwiatkowski, & Morrison-Coulthard, 2014), with both underscoring the responsibilities of researchers conducting human research.

With ethical decision-making already a complex endeavour, Internet-mediated research introduces additional ethical tensions and "grey areas" that social media researchers may be struggling to adequately address (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Weller & Kinder-Kurlanda, 2014). For instance, in their review of 30 social media research studies involving young adults, Henderson et al. (2013) found that only eight articles discussed the ethical challenges associated with their research, and six of these were "*couched in terms of what was required by the university ethics committee, not in terms of ethical considerations or issues arising through the research*" (p. 548). Subsequently, both Henderson et al. (2013) and Beaulieu and Estalella (2012) argue that researchers and research ethics committees may possess a relatively limited understanding of social media research-related issues at present.

An illustration of this issue is provided by Kramer, Guillory, and Hancock (2014), who conducted an experimental study to investigate the transference of emotional states on Facebook, covertly manipulating the presentation of status updates conveying positive and negative affect that almost 690,000 users would receive within their profile newsfeed over the period of one week. With the psychological basis of the experimental intervention and the apparent lack of opportunity for informed consent, withdrawal, or debriefing, the study received substantial criticism within the mainstream press, particularly with regards to claims that Facebook modified its user terms and conditions following the study (Hill, 2014a) and was never approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to publication (Hill, 2014b).

This was by no means an isolated case of researchers underestimating the ethical complexities of social media research, however. Zimmer (2010), for instance, presented a detailed analysis of the numerous ethical issues posed by a study of Facebook user data published by Lewis, Kaufman, Gonzalez, Wimmer, and Christakis (2008). In the study, Lewis and colleagues publicly released data collected from the Facebook profiles of 1,700 students sampled across a four-year period at a university in the North-eastern United States. Despite

attempting to protect the identities of participants by removing names and student identification numbers, and receiving ethical approval from the Harvard University IRB, Zimmer (2010) was able to successfully de-anonymise some participants and the institution by triangulating information released in the dataset.

Both of these cases conveyed what Markham and Buchanan (2012) describe as "major tensions" (p. 6) in social media research ethics. First, the authors identify an on-going debate about human subjectivity, or more specifically, whether research protocols involving only the indirect involvement of individual users require the same level of human research ethics scrutiny as those that do so more directly. As argued by Beaulieu and Estalella (2012), indirect ethnographic research conducted within mediated settings raises distinct ethical issues due to the contiguity and traceability of digital information relating to both researchers and participants, and thus, researchers need to consider their accountability towards participants. Markham and Buchanan (2012) also identify an issue of personhood upon social media and in particular, whether personal data should be considered as an extension of the self or treated as documented text, independent of the individual.

Indeed, whilst the value of "small data" detailing rich, lived experiences of individuals upon social media has been emphasised by some over the automated collection of "big data" (e.g. boyd & Crawford, 2011), others have argued that publicly accessible digital content should be treated as documented text, therefore circumnavigating the need for informed consent from its original author (Wilkinson & Thelwall, 2011). Additionally, Markham and Buchanan (2012) outline the issues associated with the assumption that personal identification from an aggregated dataset will be sufficiently low if the dataset contains a large amount of anonymous data. Specifically, the aforementioned study by Lewis, Kaufman, Gonzalez, et al. (2008) illustrated how participants could be identified by combining seemingly anonymous data sources, whilst the practice of using verbatim quotes from participants upon social media also

increases the risk of identification via search engine findings (Weller & Kinder-Kurlanda, 2014).

These issues reflect a further tension relating to participant expectations of privacy and whether data shared publicly upon social media can, and should, be considered as "private" (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). This issue is also highlighted as a key "ethical dilemma" by Henderson et al. (2013), who emphasise that participant understanding of private and public online behaviour may be particularly compromised amongst young adults, whilst Weller and Kinder-Kurlanda (2014) indicate that many social media researchers argue against the need for gaining informed consent when data is shared within the public domain, such as on Twitter, working on the assumption that users are aware of participating in public communication.

It is with these issues in mind that all of the empirical research involving human subjects in the current thesis adopted a "person-centred" approach to social media research ethics. Specifically, all of the studies received full ethical approval from the University of Nottingham's School of Psychology research ethics committee, and informed consent was gained from every participant involved. Given the particularly sensitive nature of investigating professionally risky behaviour amongst young adults, the minimal amount of network characteristics data were reported on in Study 2 (see Chapter 5) and was done so anonymously and with the informed consent of participants in Studies 3, 4, and 5. Additionally, any rich descriptions of professionally risky posts or digital behaviours in Studies 2 and 5 were reported with care and attention to avoid possible identification of participants, avoiding verbatim quotes of online content and using pseudonyms at both the individual and institutional levels.

As argued by Markham and Buchanan (2012, p. 5), "*there is much grey area in ethical decision-making … Multiple judgments are possible, and ambiguity and uncertainty are part of the process*". By adhering to a person-centred approach in which the privacy and ethical rights of the participants were paramount to the design of the empirical studies, the research presented within

this thesis sought to balance the unprecedented insights into social behaviour afforded by social media with the ethical and methodological rigour that is required of work within this burgeoning area of interest. The following chapters now outline each of the five empirical research studies conducted within this thesis in greater detail.

PART III

EMPIRICAL WORK

4

STUDY 1: ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONALLY APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

According to a recent study by KPMG (2011), as many as three-quarters of organisations within the retail and business services, communications, and financial sectors report actively using social media. Indeed, social media play an increasingly important role across a range of organisational functions, from customer services, sales, and advertising, to product development and recruiting (Broughton, Foley, Ledermaier, & Cox, 2013; Postman, 2009; Qualman, 2010; Wollan et al., 2011). This point was illustrated by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2012, 2013), who indicated that over half of the organisations with 25,000 or more employees that they had surveyed reported developing a social media strategy, with over one-third measuring the return on investment (ROI) and over two-fifths using social media for internal communications.

At the core of social media's popularity amongst organisations has been its cost-effectiveness in marketing products to vast numbers of potential consumers, the insights it provides in monitoring sentiment about services and products, and its potential for enabling employees to engage with customers on a more personal, interactive basis (Postman, 2009; SHRM, 2012; Wollan et al., 2011). Subsequently, a range of novel job roles have emerged in recent years, such as "social media champion", "social media monitoring analyst", and "social learning architect" (Zinner & Godshalk, 2011), although some reports indicate that only around one-tenth of organisations offer full-time roles based specifically on the use of social media (SHRM, 2012). Nevertheless, Boudreaux

(2011, p. 276) argues that, *"Every company employee now has the opportunity to be a spokesperson for his or her employer, whether intentionally or inadvertently."*

This point is important, as it represents significant risk to the professional reputations of both employees using social media and the organisations for which they work. As outlined previously in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4), the key structural affordances of visibility, persistence, virality, and searchability (boyd, 2014; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009) each present profound challenges to how individuals are able to manage the boundaries between personal and professional aspects of their social identity, both in the present and with respect to the future. Indeed, the previously cited cases of Paris Brown (see Chapter 1) and Justine Sacco (see Chapter 2) illustrate how adolescent posturing and attempts at humour online can lead to profoundly damaging professional consequences not only in relation to the reputations of the individuals involved but potentially also that of their employers.

A key way in which organisations have subsequently sought to mitigate reputational risk has been through the development of organisational social media policies and guidelines for employees (Wollan et al., 2011). A fundamental aim of such policies is to communicate organisational expectations of "professionally appropriate" online behaviour, and the disciplinary sanctions that may result from breaching them. Indeed, in an analysis of 46 social media policies, Boudreaux (2011) found that most focused upon protecting the organisation from risk, covering issues such as respect for confidentiality agreements, copyright laws, and similar legal obligations. Nevertheless, Boudreaux (2011) concluded that a key challenge for employers is in striking "*the right balance of empowerment and accountability*" through their social media policies, recognising that overly draconian demands may nullify the aforementioned organisational benefits of encouraging employees to use the technology.

By demarcating professionally "appropriate" and "inappropriate" online behaviour, social media policies provide important insights into the social norms

that underpin professional risky behaviour upon social media. To date, the relatively limited body of research within this area has typically characterised risky behaviour in relation to the types of content that consistently lead to negative professional judgments amongst social recruiters (e.g. Jobvite, 2014b; R. Miller & Melton, 2015; Reppler, 2011; Root & McKay, 2014). However, it is unclear as to how, methodologically, these categories of professionally risky content were constructed and whether, therefore, they represent valid constructs. Additionally, the scope of professionally risky behaviour is likely to be broader than simply relating to content, potentially also involving approaches to privacy management and behavioural predispositions.

A core aim of the current study, therefore, was to ground the concept of professional risk upon social media in organisational expectations of "professionally appropriate" online behaviour. Specifically, social media policies are proposed to reflect the types of attributes that organisations are increasingly expecting of a digitally literate and emergent workforce of "millennials" (Strauss & Howe, 2000). The research question guiding the study was subsequently,

> **RQ_1:** *What attributes do organisations expect of their employees in order for them to successfully manage risk to professional reputation when using social media?*

4.2 DESIGN

4.2.1 Method

This study used the document analysis method outlined in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3.1) to examine organisational expectations of "professionally appropriate" social media use by employees. Document analysis can be approached in a variety of ways, from examining artefacts in terms of their uses and functions to deconstructing content in order to better inform an understanding of a particular phenomenon or concept (e.g. Prior, 2008). The present study focused upon the content of social media policies, looking specifically for types of behaviour and attributes at a thematic rather than

linguistic level of analysis. Specifically, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method was adopted due to the rigorous and pragmatic process outlined by its authors for identifying themes across datasets.

As argued by May (1997, p. 157), documents reflect "*the aspirations and intentions of the period to which they refer*", and in this sense, it is important to note that social media policies are relatively unique in terms of continuously adapting their guidance to the social technologies to which they refer. This point was acknowledged explicitly by one social media policy included within the analysis, informing employees that, "*These guidelines will continue to evolve over time as new technologies and social networking tools emerge. So check back from time-to-time to make certain you are up to date*." As such, the analysis presented in this study reflects the content of policies available in July 2014. The specific sample used for the analysis is now outlined in the following section.

4.2.2 Sample

Though as many as one-third of organisations do not have a formal social media policy in place for their employees (e.g. Larcker, Larcker, & Tayan, 2012), those that do tend to be accessible via online databases, such as Boudreaux's (2014) "Social Media Governance" and Miller's (2015) "All Things IC" sites. In combination, these databases host several hundred social media policies, covering numerous industries and organisations ranging from the local and regional to the multinational (e.g. Boudreaux, 2014). Therefore, to account for the diverse range of policies available online, a systematic sampling strategy was adopted in which the policies included were those produced by organisations with high levels of brand awareness. The rationale for this approach was that more prominent brands would be likely to attract greater public attention and, therefore, face greater pressure to control their online reputation through the implementation of social media policies.

One rigorous source in defining influential brands is the "Superbrands" collective of consumers and marketing and business professionals, who, since 1995, have "*commissioned independent research to identify the UK's strongest*

brands" (Superbrands, 2014). Specifically, the group produces an annual league table of the strongest business-to-customer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) brands in the UK. For the Superbrands report published in 2014, a B2C shortlist of 1,500 brands was compiled through scores provided by 34 "senior industry figures" and 3,000 British adults, while a B2B shortlist of 1,200 brands was drafted through scores provided by 23 "senior industry figures" and 2,000 business professionals working within the UK private sector (Superbrands, 2014). In both cases, voters were asked to judge brands against three factors relating to the organisation's brand: quality, reliability, and distinction. In total, the Superbrands (2014) shortlists consisted of organisations representing 25 industries and sectors.

Drawing from the combined B2C and B2B Superbrands shortlists (2014), a random sample of 30 organisations was selected for document analysis. The aforementioned online social media policy databases (Boudreaux, 2014; R. Miller, 2015) were then consulted to find the relevant documents for each of the identified brands. This process revealed that 25 of the 30 organisations (83.3%) selected had developed social media policies for their employees, with the remaining 5 (16.7%) either publicly unavailable or yet to be developed. These remaining five organisations were removed from the sample and replaced with two random selections made from the B2C and B2B Superbrands shortlists, and the manual selection of the policies produced by IBM, Intel, and Dell, on the basis of their established proactivity in using social media to connect with customers (e.g. Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Postman, 2009).

With the exception of the video-based policy produced by KMPG, in which only the audio recording was analysed by the researcher, all policies were text-based. The mean word length of the policies analysed in the present study was 2,206 words, ranging from 461 (DHL) to 9,354 (Mercedes-Benz). This average reflected the upper end of Boudreaux's (2011) finding that almost three-fifths of the 46 social media policies analysed in his study were between 500 to 2,000 words long.

Table 1. Details of the Organisational Social Media Policies Analysed (n = 30)

Organisation	Industry (SIC 2007 Code)	No. of Words
Monster	Administrative & Support Service (N)	1,218
Kelly Services	Administrative & Support Service (N)	883
E.ON	Electricity, Gas Supply (D)	1,233
EDF	Electricity, Gas Supply (D)	1,330
Aegon	Financial & Insurance Activities (K)	1,506
Aviva	Financial & Insurance Activities (K)	535
Bupa UK	Financial & Insurance Activities (K)	1,542
British Medical Association	Human Health (Q)	2,362
Associated Press	Information & Communication (J)	2,651
BBC	Information & Communication (J)	2,148
Thomson Reuters	Information & Communication (J)	1,109
BT	Information & Communication (J)	3,091
Apple	Manufacturing (C)	1,762
Dell	Manufacturing (C)	1,031
IBM	Manufacturing (C)	2,789
Microsoft	Manufacturing (C)	3,427
JCB	Manufacturing (C)	582
Mercedes-Benz	Manufacturing (C)	9,354
Cisco	Manufacturing (C)	755
Astra Zeneca	Manufacturing (C)	1,515
Pfizer	Manufacturing (C)	3,939
Intel	Manufacturing (C)	1,293
Deloitte	Professional Activities (M)	830
Ernst & Young	Professional Activities (M)	2,345
KPMG	Professional Activities (M)	n/a
Gartner	Scientific Activities (M)	2,115
FedEx	Transport & Storage (H)	1,167
DHL	Transport & Storage (H)	461
Royal Mail	Transport & Storage (H)	2,774
Dow	Wholesale & Retail Trade (G)	8,227

All policies were classified by industry according to the United Kingdom Standard Industrial Classification of Economic Activities (SIC, 2007), with 9 of the SIC's 21 industry classifications covered in total, and the manufacturing sector particularly well represented with one-third of the policies analysed produced by computing, pharmaceutical, and machinery manufacturers. A full list of the 30 organisational social media policies, their associated SIC (2007) designated industry and word length are presented in Table 1. The following section outlines the analytical process through which themes were identified.

4.2.3 Approach to Document Analysis

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, the study used the NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2014) qualitative analysis software to inductively generate a set of 66 codes that represented various semantic features of the policy content. Next, associations were identified between the codes, leading to the generation of tentative candidate themes. The outcome of this initial pass in the analysis is represented in Appendix A. The following step involved a more deductive process of refining the candidate themes and related sub-themes, and removing non-relevant codes until the remaining themes adequately represented the dataset. A key part of this process was the active role played by the researcher, drawing particularly from aspects of the social psychological and computing literatures discussed in Chapter 2 to move between inductive and deductive modes of analysis. The final iteration of main themes and sub-themes is illustrated in Figure 3.

The following section now presents the full analysis, in which two overarching themes were identified, in addition to first and second-order sub-themes. Though qualitative researchers have opted to represent the prevalence of themes and sub-themes in a variety of ways, from the use of qualitative descriptors to quantitative counts (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the current analysis indicates their occurrence across the entire sample of documents using the following notation: [n, %]. This approach is adopted to illustrate the commonality of a particular trend or theme across all of the policies analysed. Where appropriate, direct quotes are cited in order to support points made in reference to key themes and sub-themes throughout the analysis.

4.3 FINDINGS

The first of the two main themes identified in the current study relates to the knowledge and skills expected of employees in their use of social media. In the context of the present analysis, knowledge refers to aspects of information that are required by the employee to engage "appropriately" with social media,

whilst skill refers to aspects of the employee's competency in acting upon this knowledge. The following section outlines the first **(in bold)** and second-order sub-themes subsumed within the knowledge-skills main theme, as illustrated in Figure 3.

4.3.1 Theme I: Knowledge-Skills

Almost all of the policies analysed in the current study [29, 97%] emphasised the need for their employees to maintain an awareness of the **legal implications** associated with using social media. Reflecting Boudreaux's (2011, p. 278) conclusion that "*most social media policies focus on protecting the company from risk*", two-thirds of the policies flagged the need for employees to consider copyright and fair use laws [20, 67%], from BT's succinct directive of "*ensure you are not infringing copyright rules*", to Aegon's lengthier and more complex wording, in which employees are informed that they grant the organisation "*a worldwide, perpetual, irrevocable, royalty-free and fully-paid, transferable right and license to exercise all copyright, publicity, moral rights and any other IP rights with respect to any content you provide*."

In a similar respect, most policies [27, 90%] clarified demands for employees to respect confidentiality agreements when posting to social media. As stressed by BT's policy, "*Never disclose commercially sensitive or privacy marked company information in your contributions… don't discuss competitors, customers, partners or suppliers without their prior approval*". Indeed, the importance of professional responsibility was emphasised repeatedly throughout Apple's social media policy document, with the corporation reminding employees, "*you have an obligation to protect the confidential, proprietary and trade secret information of the company*", primarily to maintain competitive advantage and positive "brand equity" (e.g. Berry, 2000); a perspective summarised succinctly in Gartner's social media policy through the warning, "*Don't give away the farm*".

Additionally, just over half of the policies [16, 53%] highlighted more general "legal safeguards" that employees needed to be aware of in order to

avoid incurring potential legal action. As the longest policy, Mercedes-Benz warned its employees that, "*Naturally, abusive, slanderous or illegal contents have no business in your profile*", whilst Pfizer was similarly clear in outlining its own expectations, stating, "*All Colleagues and Contingent Workers are personally and legally responsible for the content of the commentary they post and can be held liable for unlawful activities*." Indeed, around half of the documents [14, 47%] underscored the disciplinary implications associated with violating the policies, as illustrated by Cisco ("*Please be aware that violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination*") and Dell ("*If you don't follow the principles laid out below when engaging in Social Media you could face serious consequences up to termination*.").

Almost two-thirds of the social media policies [19, 63%] also emphasised the need for employees to be cognisant of the **organisation's values**, and to align their online behaviour accordingly. As emphasised in Dell's social media guidelines document, "*Dell employees hold ourselves to high ethical standards, as our Code of Conduct spells out, and that applies to Social Media just like everything else you do as a Dell employee*." Indeed, a number of policies underlined that in using social media, employees needed to be familiar with the organisation's specific values and mission statements. This point was illustrated by FedEx's policy, in which the online behaviour of employees was expected to embody "*the FedEx Code of Business Conduct and Ethics; FedEx brand usage standards; and your operating company's Acceptable Conduct and Computer/Internet Resources policies*."

In broader terms, the majority of the social media policies explicitly emphasised the need for employees to engage sound, professional **judgment** when using technology [20, 66%]. Specifically, a number of the policies made reference to the notion of "common sense" [12, 40%], reflecting a bottom-up approach in which individual judgment was key, rather than top-down, organisational direction. As outlined in the Cisco policy, *"Common sense is the best guide if you decide to post information in any way relating to Cisco."* Apple's

directive was similarly broad, advising, *"When facing a tough decision: use good judgment"*, whilst Thomson Reuters' policy document simply requested that employees *"Be sensible."* Elaborating further, a small number of policies emphasised the role of personal intuition, with IBM advising employees, *"If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, review the suggestions above and think about why that is."*

As a technology enabling semi-public and public communication with customers, clients, and other professional stakeholders, just under one-third of the social media policies emphasised the need for employees to pay close attention to their **communication style** [9, 30%]. For some of the organisations, the expectations conveyed were relatively broad (DHL: "*Pay attention to your wording*") and related to basic rules of spelling and grammar (Aviva: "*use a spell-checker; make sure your writing makes sense; use capital letters in the right place – DON'T USE CAPITAL LETTERS ALL THE TIME"*). For others, however, more specific guidance was offered with respect to tone and authenticity, with FedEx's policy providing one illustration, advising employees to *"Use your own style: Communicating effectively in social media means expressing yourself in a human, genuine, and friendly way."*

The focus of some policies upon encouraging employees to use their personal "voice" upon social media contrasted with the otherwise risk-aversive objectives of the documents. In particular, empowering employees to convey authenticity involves a degree of trust on the part of the employer that professionally appropriate judgments will be made. For instance, the Thomson-Reuters policy advised its employees that "*A conversational, personal tone often works best – similar to how you'd speak",* yet the distinction between informal style within a professional context and amongst non-work based friends may be a subtle but important one to make, requiring relatively advanced communication skills on the part of the employee. This appeared to be particularly the case for workers within journalistic roles, with the BBC emphasising that "*impartiality and objectivity is crucial"* and similarly, the

Associated Press' policy highlighting *"a special obligation to be even-handed in your tweets."*

In addition to communication skills, over four-fifths of the policy documents [25, 83%] emphasised the need for employees to demonstrate high levels of **social media literacy** with respect to the specific risks posed by the technology. In particular, over half of the policies [17, 56%] highlighted the need for employees to be aware of the permanency of content shared upon social media, reflecting many of the concerns discussed in the literature with respect to damaging reputational consequences (e.g. Mayer-Schönberger, 2009; Solove, 2007). For instance, Aviva's policy instructed employees to *"Think about your digital footprint. Everything you write can be read over and again, by millions of people, long after it has been written. So consider comments carefully; always write professionally."* Additionally, EDF's policy emphasised the intractable nature of interactions upon social media, warning, *"Once it's out, it's out. You can't effectively delete tweets or posts, so be clear on what's EDF-confidential or otherwise unwise to share."*

Similarly, two-fifths of the policies [12, 40%] emphasised the need for employees to be aware of the "viral" affordance of social media (boyd, 2014; Mills, 2012). This point was illustrated by Dell, warning employees, *"Social Media lets you communicate incredibly fast and have your message go viral in seconds… Remember that anything posted in social media can go viral, no matter what your privacy settings may be."* Indeed, a number of policies stressed the potential for content to "go viral" not only when posted on a publicly accessible social media profile, but when seemingly protected by restrictive privacy settings (Associated Press: "*It's all too easy for someone to copy material out of restricted pages and redirect it elsewhere for wider viewing."*) and even after content has been deleted (E.On: "*Even though you can delete your post, chances are someone has already seen it, taken a screen grab and sent it around the world.*").

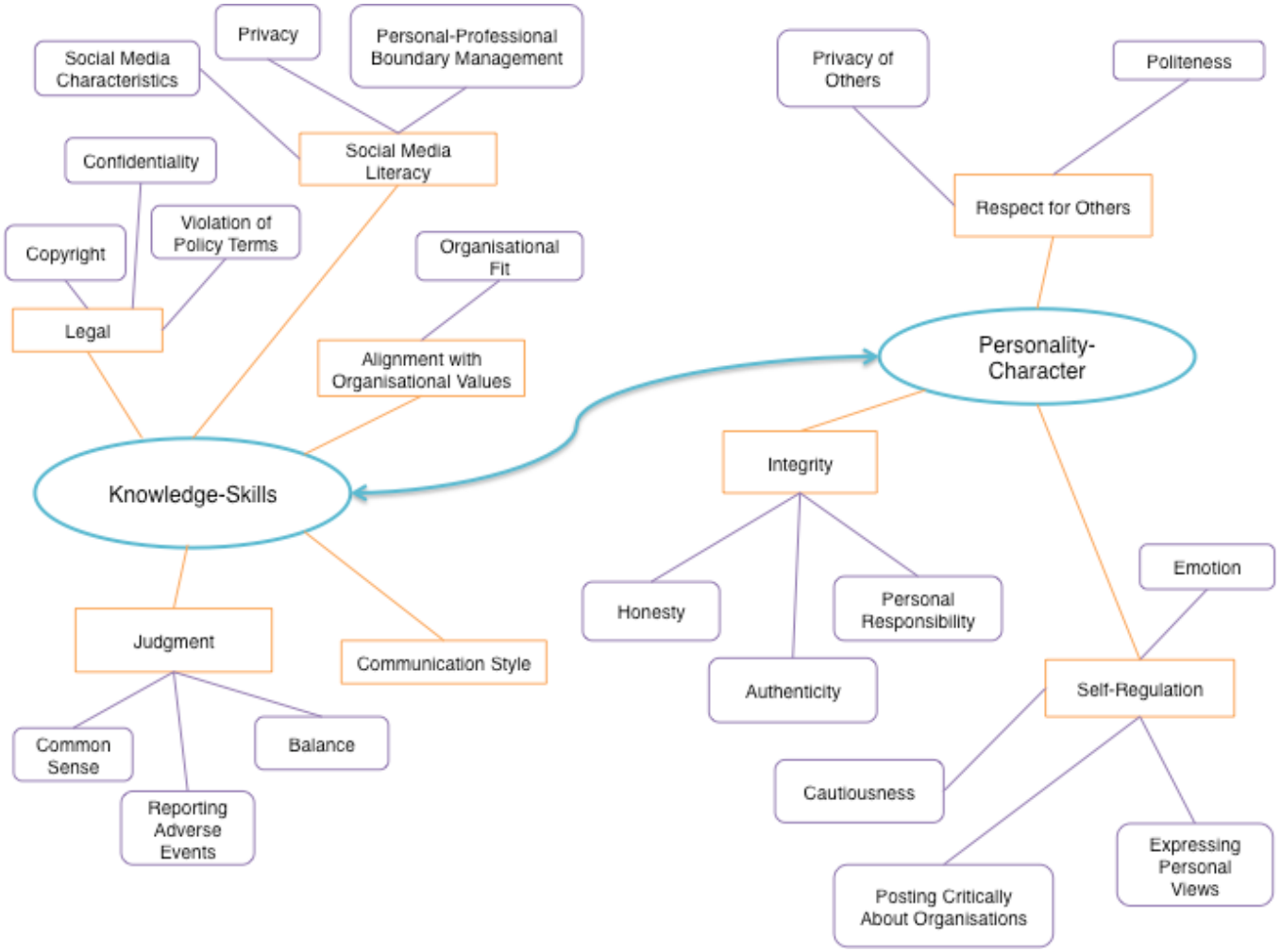


Figure 3. Final Thematic Map Representing the Thematic Analysis

Subsequently, over half of the policies analysed underscored the need for employees to consider privacy at all times [17, 56%]. As advised by Aegon, "*Be smart about protecting yourself, your privacy and the privacy of others.*" Elaborating on this, numerous policies outlined the need for employees to understand and keep up to date with default privacy controls (E.ON: "*Make sure you understand the settings on your profile before you start publishing. Social networks also change their terms and conditions… so make sure you check them regularly"*). Relatedly, half of the policies [15, 50%] urged employees to actively manage the boundaries between personal and professional aspects of life. The expectation was clear in E.On's policy ("*Keep your professional and personal lives separate*"), and similarly, the British Medical Association (BMA) advised, "*that doctors and medical students should not accept Facebook friend requests from current or former patients.*"

For other organisations, policies appeared to approach the issue of personal-professional boundary management as a decision requiring personal evaluation, rather than top-down direction. For instance, EDF indicated that mixing personal and professional contacts on social media was "*fine as long as what you share is appropriate for professional contacts, and you are comfortable including them in other parts of your life.*" This approach was also reflected by BT, albeit reminding employees how they "*may well be connected to BT colleagues and even BT customers, partners and suppliers*" without necessarily realising it. For IBM, this possibility was made explicit by emphasising to employees that "*By virtue of identifying yourself as an IBMer within a social network, you are now connected to your colleagues, managers and even IBM's clients."*

The following section now outlines the second overarching theme identified through the analysis: the types of personality and character traits expected of employees in their use of social media. In the context of the present analysis, the broad labels of "personality" and "character" refer to aspects of personal disposition that the social media policy documents implied were

important for employees to be able to use social media in a professionally "appropriate" manner.

4.3.2 Theme II: Personality-Character

A particularly prevalent theme throughout the policies was the importance of **integrity** in how employees used social media [28, 93%]. Indeed, IBM's directive of "*Be who you are. We believe in transparency and honesty",* reflected a consistent emphasis upon the open disclosure of identity when interacting with others online [25, 83%]. In many policies, this was interpreted both in terms of employees openly declaring associations with products (Astra Zeneca: "*Be transparent if there's a risk of conflict of interest*") and the organisation (Dell: "*When you talk about Dell on Social Media, you should disclose that you work for Dell*"). Specifically, around two-thirds of the policies [19, 63%] required employees to use a disclaimer upon their social media profile, such as, *"I work for AstraZeneca. All opinions expressed are my own and do not necessarily represent the position of my employer"*.

The core rationale for this appeared to be in terms of determining personal liability, with three-quarters of the policies [23, 76%] further emphasising that any actions on social media were the responsibility of the employee. This point was illustrated by Cisco in their reminder to employees that "*because you are legally responsible for your postings, you may be subject to liability if your posts are found defamatory, harassing, or in violation of any other applicable law.*" Reflecting the legal focus outlined previously, Cisco elaborated further by notifying employees that "*you agree that Cisco shall not be liable, under any circumstances, for any errors, omissions, loss or damages claimed or incurred due to any of your Internet postings."*

With this in mind, the expectation that employees would demonstrate **respect for others** online [28, 93%] appears to take on extra importance. The concept of respect appeared to be instantiated in a variety of forms, such as respecting the privacy of others [22, 73%], including co-workers (Astra Zeneca: *"you should think carefully before sharing information about colleagues"*), but also

external stakeholders (BT: *"Don't discuss competitors, customers, partners or suppliers without their prior approval."*). Building upon the previous discussion of communication style, a similar proportion of the policies [22, 73%] emphasised the need for employees to respect others by maintaining a polite and agreeable approach when using social media to communicate with others. As reflected by Monster's request to employees, *"be friendly, honest, respectful and helpful in communicating online, just as you are in the real world"*.

However, by encouraging employees to be open, authentic, and "*bring* [their] *own personality to the forefront."* (IBM), organisations also embrace the risk that they may make mistakes that pose a threat to reputation. Accounting for this, one-fifth of the policies [6, 20%] stressed that employees should maintain an open, honest approach, and avoid trying to cover up or hide the error. For instance, Intel's social media policy advised it employees that "*If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. If you're posting to a blog, you may choose to modify an earlier post—just make it clear that you have done so."* Similarly, the policies produced by IBM, Mercedes, and the AP underscored the importance for employees to "*be the first to respond to your own mistakes*", ensuring that transgressions were acknowledged quickly to "*help to restore trust*" with customers.

Nevertheless, a seemingly preferable approach emphasised throughout all of the policies was for employees to carefully **self-regulate** their interactions with social media [30, 100%]. Within this theme, the policies implied several relationships between personality and character attributes and the expression of professionally "appropriate" behaviour online. Specifically, a substantial number of policies [26, 87%] underscored the need for employees to be cautious and conscientious in their use of social media, including the importance of reviewing posts multiple times prior to online publication (Aviva: *"Before clicking 'send', 'tweet' or 'go', read what you've written – out loud preferably, at least twice definitely!"*). Indeed, as expressed in EDF's policy, many of the policies

appeared to advocate an approach in which *"It's better to be right slowly than wrong quickly."*

A number of policies elaborated further by prompting employees to specifically consider the reactions of a professional audience prior to posting (DHL: "*If in doubt, ask yourself if you would share the content directly with a work colleague, superior or associate."*). Additionally, Microsoft's policy emphasised the potentially wide range of audiences with access to content, prompting employees to consider, *"How would it look on Slashdot or on the front page of the New York Times? What would your manager or VP think? Could a customer or partner make a wrong decision based on your posting? What would a competitor do with your posting?"* Subsequently, many of the policies conveyed the expectation that employees would be vigilant to the expectations and motivations of their various online audiences, seemingly reflecting the concept of self-monitoring, in which sensitivity to social context plays a key role (e.g. Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Snyder, 1974).

The policies identified numerous types of specific online behaviours requiring particularly close self-regulation from employees. First, three-fifths of the policies [18, 60%] emphasised the need for employees to avoid expressing online criticism of either competing organisations or their own employer. For instance, some policies highlighted the potential reputational damage for the organisation (AP: "*trash-talking about anyone (including a team, company or celebrity) reflects badly on staffers and the AP."*), whilst others, as illustrated by Microsoft's policy, focused primarily on the potential legal implications, warning employees that *"critical blog posts about competitors and others generate ill will and can even lead to lawsuits, justified or not."* Additionally, Gartner's policy was clear with respect to guarding the employer's reputation, instructing employees to "*Present Gartner in a positive light and avoid making derogatory comments about Gartner, our products, services, management, employees, or systems."*

A number of the policies also emphasised the expectation that employees would suppress sharing their personal views online in relation to certain topics

[6, 20%]. For instance, Gartner's policy directed its employees to "*avoid … topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory – such as topics in the areas of politics and religion*", while the Associated Press emphasised that "*AP staffers must be aware that opinions they express may damage the AP's reputation as an unbiased source of news."* Indeed, reflecting the previously outlined expectation of balanced communication in media-based roles, the BBC's policy emphasised that *"Editorial staff and staff in politically sensitive areas should never indicate a political allegiance on social networking sites, either through profile information or through joining political groups."*

Moving from the self-regulation of content to affect, around one-quarter of the policies [8, 27%] outlined the need for employees to suppress emotion when posting or responding to others upon social media. In a number of cases, this perspective translated into advising employees against reacting impulsively (Gartner*: "Avoid posting in the heat of the moment, especially in a discussion that is escalating into a flame war.")*, with JCB advising that, "*highly emotional communication is very likely to prolong useless argument, increase misunderstanding and make the situation worse.*" Subsequently, many of the policies appeared to emphasise the importance of emotional stability when posting, as illustrated by BT's directive for employees to *"Keep calm: don't pick fights by escalating heated discussions but be conciliatory, respectful and quote facts to lower the temperature and correct misrepresentations. Never contribute to a discussion if you are angry."*

Though less prevalent in comparison to many of the aforementioned themes, some expectations outlined by the policies appeared to be contradictory. In particular, the use of humour [5, 17%] was recognised by some policies as being desirable (Gartner: "*The most successful blogs are those with an informal and humorous style"*; BT: "*A good blogger … needs a sense of humour!*"), whereas in other policies, it represented a source of potential professional risk. For instance, Aviva's policy emphasised that employees were required to "*remember that words are open to interpretation – and ironic humour is hard to*

make effective in writing", while DHL warned employees through their policy to "*Be careful with humor, irony and sarcasm. Without facial expressions and gestures, your intentions are harder to grasp."*

4.4 DISCUSSION

The fundamental objective of organisational social media policies is to control the professional risk associated with unregulated employee use of the technology. Indeed, Boudreaux (2011) observed that social media policies tend to focus upon protecting the organisation from the legal implications of professionally risky online behaviour, rather than on ways in which to empower employees to express their individuality. The policy documents analysed in the current chapter similarly emphasised the expectation that employees using social media should be familiar with copyright and fair use laws, professional confidentiality agreements, and slander law. However, the same policies also conveyed expectations in relation to a range of factors that may influence professionally risky behaviour on social media.

Addressing the main research question (**RQ_1**) of what attributes were expected of employees in order for them to successfully engage in professionally "appropriate" behaviour upon social media, the analysis identified two overarching themes. The first referred to various aspects of knowledge and skills, which in addition to an awareness of legal implications and organisational values included the application of "common sense" professional judgment, the communication skills to interact with others in an engaging and authentic yet professional style, and the social media literacy to understand and manage the professional risk presented by the persistence, accessibility, and virality of data shared online.

One characteristic of these attributes is that many may be tied with professional experience gained within the workplace, making them difficult for young adults to exhibit prior to, and shortly after, organisational entry. Indeed, the Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc, 2014) recently proposed that a

core focus for colleges and universities in the UK needs to be upon "developing digital literacies" of young adults, particular in relation to the use of "*digital devices, applications and services*" and the management of "*digital reputation and online identity*" as part of a focus on career. However, the emphasis upon "common sense" judgments within the policies analysed in the current study assumes an awareness of, and access to, professional norms that many young adults may simply have yet to experience.

Similarly, most individuals preparing to make the college-to-work transition seem unlikely to be especially vigilant to the legal consequences of using social media, despite it being expected by employers. Indeed, the rising prominence of "mashup" culture in recent years upon social media (e.g. Sonvilla-Weiss, 2010; Tapscott, 2008) has seen young adults users drawn towards processes of "bricolage" (Levi-Strauss, 1966), sampling and remixing existing digital works to construct new creations on content community sites, such as Soundcloud and YouTube. Such practices may present challenges for young adults as they enter the workplace and are suddenly expected to pay closer attention to copyright and fair use laws.

Given their experience of using social media, however, young adults may otherwise be expected to excel with respect to understanding the reputational challenges posed by the persistence, accessibility, and virality of online interactions. Indeed, recent studies of teens and their privacy behaviour upon social media have concluded that young adults may be becoming increasingly aware of the need to regulate their online behaviour and the access that others have to it (Madden et al., 2013; Madden & Smith, 2010). However, Madden et al. (2013) also indicated that members of this cohort seem to be sharing greater amounts of personal information than ever, suggesting that whilst they may be becoming increasingly knowledgeable of the need to utilise privacy settings on Facebook, online behaviour within "private" networks continue to be professionally risky (e.g. Debatin et al., 2009; Karl et al., 2010; Peluchette & Karl, 2007; Tufekci, 2008).

The second theme identified throughout the policies referred to aspects of personality and character attributes associated with "professionally appropriate" use of social media. In particular, almost all of the policies emphasised the need for employees to vigilantly self-regulate their use of social media, exercising caution when posting, avoiding explicit criticism of others, suppressing the desire to post upon social media when in a highly emotive state, and avoiding the expression of personal views on potentially controversial or divisive topics such as religion and politics. Additionally, almost all policies emphasised the importance for employees to demonstrate respect for others and integrity through their use of social media, ensuring that actions are honest, transparent, and authentic, and that personal liability is assumed.

This overarching theme indicates that organisations did not simply expect their employees to possess the knowledge and skills to behave in a professionally appropriate manner upon social media, but that individual differences in particular personality traits may be a factor in the management of professionally risky behaviour online. Specifically, the policies appeared to imply that the "type" of employee likely to violate organisational expectations of "professionally appropriate" behaviour upon social media may be one with predispositions towards reckless, impulsive actions, who is relatively insensitive to the behavioural norms of the immediate social context when expressing themselves, who demonstrates little consideration for the feelings of others, and who is predisposed towards poorly regulated emotional reactions.

With reference to the psychological literature on individual differences and personality, the social media policies therefore appear to indicate potentially important roles for various traits. Specifically, these include the conscientiousness (FedEx: "*Be careful and thoughtful about what you post*"), agreeableness (Dell: "*Be nice, have fun, and connect*") and neuroticism (BT: "*Never contribute to a discussion if you are angry*") domains of the five-factor personality model (Costa & McCrae, 1992a), in addition to Snyder's (1974) self-monitoring concept (E.On: "*Remember you're in a public space and only publish*

things you want other people to see") and Barratt's (1959) notion of impulsiveness (EY: "*Employees should think before they post*"). As outlined in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.5), the association between personality and social media use has become an increasingly prominent area of social computing research, although few empirical studies have focused specifically on the link with professionally risky behaviour to date (e.g. Karl et al., 2010; Moore & McElroy, 2012).

The social media policies analysed in the current study also appeared to indicate the potentially contradictory organisational expectation that employees would engage with social media in honest, transparent, and authentic ways, whilst at the same time ensuring that online interactions would at all times be closely and carefully self-regulated. For individuals predisposed towards vigilant, conscientious, and agreeable social behaviour, "authentic" self-expression of personality upon social media may pose minimal risk to either their own professional reputation or that of their employee. However, for individuals where there is a discrepancy between the two, or where the social situation encourages the expression of online behaviours that would violate expectations of professional appropriateness conveyed by the social media policies, reputational damage may be a tangible prospect.

For the types of large multinational organisations sampled in the current study, striking the right balance between trusting and controlling employees upon social media is a complex and yet crucial endeavour given that professional reputation can very quickly and easily be damaged as the result of unrestricted employee actions (e.g. Beal & Strauss, 2009; Qualman, 2010; Stradtman, 2012). In light of the conceptual links between trust and risk (e.g. Slovic, 1999), it is perhaps understandable that most of the policies reflected the "mitigation" and "information" stages of social media policy development identified by Boudreaux (2011), in which organisations focus upon informing employees of their legal responsibilities and how they should behave online in order to uphold the organisation's values. In doing so, the analysis presented in this chapter has not

only identified potential factors relating to the research objective of this thesis, but has underlined how social media policies are primarily designed to protect the professional reputation of the organisation - and not its employees.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study demonstrated that organisational social media policies conceptualise the "professionally appropriate" online behaviour of employees in relation to two particular types of attributes: first, knowledge and skills in relation to legal responsibilities, organisational values, social media literacy, and professional judgment, and second, personality and character predispositions in relation to integrity, self-regulation, and respect for others. In particular, the study has highlighted the potential contradictions inherent to expecting employees to use social media in an open, honest, and authentic manner, whilst simultaneously closely monitoring and self-regulating their interactions as part of a general approach characterised by caution, vigilance, and risk aversion.

Perhaps most crucially, however, the policies emphasise the organisational expectation that employees should "*keep professional image in mind even in social contexts"* (EDF), thus reflecting the redefinition of traditional, offline notions of personal and professional boundaries within the digital society. In this sense, rather than serving to reinforce the boundaries between these particular social spheres, as proposed by Fieseler, Meckel, and Ranzini (2015), social media policies appear to do precisely the opposite, instead underlining their progressive erosion and subsequently, conveying the types of attributes that are likely to pose a risk to professional reputation. Less clear, however, is how employees reconcile the personal and professional aspects of their social identity online, and subsequently perceive and manage the professional risks associated with their use of social media. The following chapter now outlines how Study 2 examined these important research questions.

5

STUDY 2: EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS AND MANAGEMENT OF RISK TO PROFESSIONAL REPUTATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of Study 1 demonstrated how social media policies convey a range of organisational expectations, not only in terms of the professional and social media-related knowledge and skills of employees, but also with regards to the personality and character attributes likely to influence "professionally appropriate" behaviour online. In doing so, social media policies appear to both reflect and reinforce the increasingly interwoven aspects of personal and professional life upon social media, with employees expected by their employers to consider the professional consequences of their online actions even in seemingly non-work related interactions. With policies requiring employees to accept personal liability in their use of social media and in particular, any actions that may have damaging reputational consequences, there is a pressing need to understand how professional risk is both perceived and managed by individuals within this context.

According to Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, and Berg (2013), and Fieseler et al. (2015), relatively little research to date has examined how employees how manage personal and professional boundaries upon social media. As illustrated by the literature review presented in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4), however, a number of studies have examined this issue (e.g. Binder et al., 2009; J. M. DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Lampinen et al., 2009; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Wu et al., 2010), albeit forming different conclusions with respect to the psychological and self-presentational consequences of introducing work-based contacts into online social networks (e.g. Binder et al., 2009; Lampinen et

al., 2009; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). Nevertheless, a gap does appear to exist within the literature with respect to how employees perceive and manage the risks that blurred online boundaries pose to their professional reputation.

Additionally, whilst existing research has focused upon employee use of both enterprise and commercial social media sites, much of it has been conducted within large, "tech-savvy" commercial enterprises, such as IBM (e.g. J. DiMicco et al., 2008; J. M. DiMicco & Millen, 2007; Ehrlich & Shami, 2010; Wu et al., 2010) and Microsoft (e.g. Archambault & Grudin, 2012; Skeels & Grudin, 2009; Zhang et al., 2014). It is therefore unclear as to extent to which the experiences of employees working within a sector where online technologies are core to the organisations generalise to those of employees based within organisations or roles where social media has only recently started to be utilised. Given their dual roles as both commercial enterprises and education providers (e.g. Whitchurch, 2006; Whitchurch, 2007), and increasingly widespread adoption of the technology in recent years (e.g. Kent & Leaver, 2014; Selwyn, 2009), universities represent an appropriate context in which to extend this area of research.

Social media has played a prominent role in the student experience since the launch of Facebook in 2004 (e.g. Ellison et al., 2007; Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Kent & Leaver, 2014; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Selwyn, 2009; Wilson et al., 2012). However, this cohort are just one of various work-related audiences for university employees to consider when using social media, also including colleagues, peers, funding bodies, the mainstream press, and members of general public. Additionally, UK-based employees within academic roles are faced with balancing expectations of "professionally appropriate" use outlined by their institution's social media policy against the "academic freedom" to express controversial or unpopular opinions without sanction, as outlined in The Education (No. 2) Act of 1986 (Universities UK, 2011). In seeking to further examine the concept of professional risk upon social media, the first research question explored in the current study was:

RQ$_{2a}$: *How do employees understand and define professionally risky interactions with, and upon, social media?*

The current study also examined how employees prevent and respond to the expression of professionally risky behaviour whilst using social media. In particular, the study builds upon the preceding research investigating online boundary management (e.g. Lampinen et al., 2009) and the preventative actions and "repair strategies" adopted to address online regret (Moore & McElroy, 2012; Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al., 2013; Y. Wang et al., 2011). For instance, Lampinen et al. (2009) proposed that individuals engage in two main forms of boundary management strategies: first, behavioural strategies relating to preventative actions such as self-censorship and use of privacy controls, and second, mental strategies such as conceiving more inclusive in-group identities; a strategy described as the "lowest common denominator" approach (Hogan, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2011a).

Taken together, the existing literature appears to depict a complex relationship between these psychological and behavioural strategies of information disclosure and control. Indeed, Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) outline a number of boundary management behaviours available to employees, ranging from enabling open access, to focusing primarily either on the control of content or the access of audiences, or a hybrid combination of the two. However, these strategies have received little empirical attention within a professional context, and are further complicated by the "*rich and diverse ecology of social media sites*" (Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 242) accessible to employees, where norms around privacy and network management differ markedly (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1). With this in mind, the second research question of this study was:

RQ$_{2b}$: *How do employees manage risk to professional reputation across their social media ecologies?*

The chapter now turns to how these research questions were addressed through the use of semi-structured interviews with various employees of a single UK-based university. The details of this approach are outlined as follows.

5.2 DESIGN

5.2.1 Participants

The current study used a sample of 14 full-time employees from a single UK-based Higher Education Institution (HEI), referred to henceforth as *Middleton University* (MU). At the time of the study, MU was attended by over thirty thousand students, employed several thousand members of part- and full-time professional services and academic staff, and was a Russell Group member (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2), ranked within the upper percentile of universities for its quality of research and teaching. To reflect the broad range of employee roles within universities (e.g. Whitchurch, 2006; Whitchurch, 2007), the initial sampling strategy involved randomly selecting two departments from each of Middleton University's five academic faculties and ten professional services departments. Heads of Department and Office Managers were contacted by email in January 2012, and asked to forward an invitational email with details of the study to departmental members who used at least one form of social media for work-related purposes.

However, following a poor response rate an alternative approach was adopted using a chain referral, or "snowball", sampling technique (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Specifically, a senior employee and relatively prolific user of social media within MU was identified, interviewed, and subsequently offered to act as a source of referral for subsequent participants. Participant recruitment continued until it was judged by the researcher that data saturation had occurred (e.g. Morse, 1995) and few novel themes in relation to the research questions were emerging from the data. With data collection ceasing after 14 interviews, the study was broadly in line with findings elsewhere of data saturation in nonprobabilistic samples (e.g. Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Due to the sensitivity of the research topic, all participants were provided with pseudonyms, which are detailed in Table 2 along with various characteristics of the sample. Specifically, the sample consisted of nine female (64%) and five male (36%) employees, with the majority of interviewees (10,

71%) based within administrative roles, and four in academic positions (29%). In total, eight professional services departments and four academic faculties were represented in the sample, and the majority of interviewees (8, 57%) were based in roles that involved managerial responsibilities. Most of the interviewees (9, 64%) held senior roles and with over ten years of professional experience were classified within the "maintenance" stage of Mount's (1984) career model. Of the remaining interviewees, three employees (22%) were at the "advancement" stage with between two and ten years of professional experience, whilst two (14%) were at the "establishment" stage, with less than two years of experience.

5.2.2 Method and Procedure

As outlined previously in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3.2), the semi-structured interview method enables researchers to cover a range of topics and themes, with flexibility in the precise sequence in which questions are asked and the opportunity to pose follow-up questions (e.g. Mason, 2004). The 14 interviews were conducted face-to-face in private office spaces upon MU's main campus, and each lasted for approximately 60 minutes. At the outset of each interview, the researcher provided the participant with written information about the study, checked for any questions requiring clarification, and acquired both written and verbal consent for participation and to record audio from the interview for the purposes of consolidating note taking and transcription.

Each interview covered five broad themes informed by both the findings of Study 1 and the bodies of literature reviewed previously in Chapter 2. Although the precise phrasing and ordering of questions were altered slightly between interviews, consistency was maintained by ensuring that each session included questions relating to each of the five themes, as outlined by the protocol in Appendix B.

Table 2. Gender and Job Characteristics of Employees Interviewed (n = 14)

		Job Characteristics				
Interviewee	*Gender*	*Job Type*	*Department/Faculty*	*Job Role*	*Job Level*	*Career Stage*
Jess	Female	Administrative	Faculty-Based Marketing	Non-Managerial	Officer	Advancement
Phil	Male	Administrative	Central Marketing	Managerial	Senior	Advancement
Roger	Male	Administrative	Central Administration	Managerial	Senior	Maintenance
Suzie	Female	Administrative	Careers Service	Managerial	Senior	Maintenance
Dana	Female	Administrative	Faculty-Based Marketing	Non-Managerial	Officer	Maintenance
Rose	Female	Administrative	Medicine & Health	Non-Managerial	Officer	Maintenance
Peter	Male	Academic	Arts	Managerial	Senior Lecturer	Maintenance
Cathy	Female	Administrative	Central Marketing	Non-Managerial	Officer	Advancement
Stephanie	Female	Administrative	Human Resources	Managerial	Officer	Maintenance
Pauline	Female	Administrative	Human Resources	Managerial	Team Leader	Maintenance
Emma	Female	Administrative	Alumni Relations	Non-Managerial	Officer	Establishment
David	Male	Academic	Social Sciences	Managerial	Senior	Maintenance
Will	Male	Academic	Arts	Non-Managerial	Lecturer	Establishment
Frances	Female	Academic	Science	Managerial	Senior Lecturer	Maintenance

Specifically, each interview began with questions seeking background information from the interviewees about their career and more specifically, their job role at MU. Participants were then asked to describe their digital presence, providing details of the specific sites they used, their motivations for doing so, and the approximate size of their online networks. This then led to questions about how the interviewees used social media to support their professional activity, and whether they perceived any particular expectations to do so within their role.

Interviewees were then asked about the specific audiences and social groups upon their social media profiles, and in particular, how they managed the boundaries between personal and professional audiences, and whether any specific professional opportunities or conflicts had arisen whilst using social media. Questions were then asked about perceptions of professional reputation online, both in terms of their own and that of salient others, such as colleagues and professional peers. Finally, participants were asked about how they personally defined professionally risky behaviour online, how this potentially differed across platforms, and the extent to which they considered the professional consequences of their behaviour when using social media. At the close of each interview, the researcher thanked the participant for their time and debriefed them on the main aims of the study.

5.2.3 Approach to Thematic Analysis

The study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis to analyse over 90,000 words of text, fully transcribed from just under 14 hours of audio recordings. Transcripts were read and re-read in full by the researcher, leading to the generation of an initial set of codes that identified the semantic features of content relating to both of the research questions, **RQ$_{2a}$** and **RQ$_{2b}$**. Using the NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2014) qualitative analysis software, each data item was systematically given "*full and equal attention*" throughout the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with some extracts coded once or even multiple times. This phase of the analysis subsequently yielded 135 codes that

related to one or both of the research questions. These codes are presented in Appendix B.

Given the richness and breadth of the data, a large number of candidate themes and sub-themes were identified in the following phase of the analysis. Whilst the codes were initially identified inductively, themes were generated by the researcher as part of a more deductive process, drawing particularly upon the bodies of social psychological and computing literature reviewed in Chapter 2. In particular, the candidate themes were identified along with a second researcher, retaining them only if they cohered together meaningfully as a theme, but had clear and identifiable distinctions from other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990). During this iterative process, any codes and themes lacking relevance to the research questions were discarded. Titles for the themes and related sub-themes were created and refined as extracts collated for each theme were referenced and cross-checked for coherency. This recursive process ceased once the themes and sub-themes were felt to adequately represent the data.

The following section now presents the full analysis, in which four overarching themes were identified, in addition to first and second-order sub-themes (see Appendix B). These themes, and their respective relationships, are illustrated in Figure 4. As with the thematic analysis conducted in Study 1 (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3), the following section indicates the prevalence of themes across the entire sample of documents using the following notation: [n, %]. This approach is adopted to illustrate the commonality of a particular theme across all of the employees interviewed. Where appropriate, direct quotes are taken from the interview transcripts in order to support points made in reference to the themes and sub-themes discussed in the analysis.

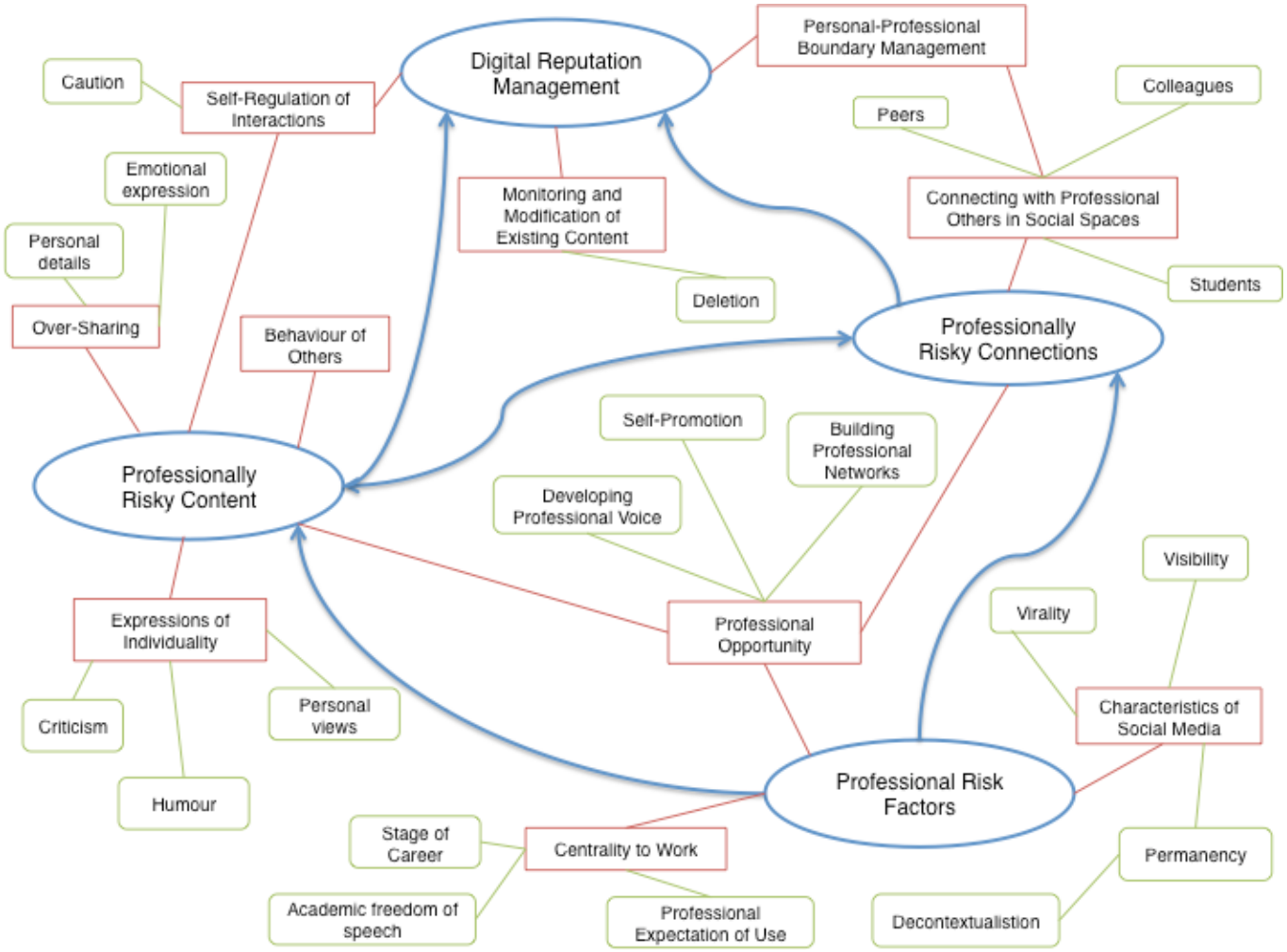


Figure 4. Final Thematic Map Representing the Thematic Analysis

5.3 FINDINGS

5.3.1 Network Characteristics

As illustrated in Table 3, employees interviewed in the current study used an average of four social media sites each ($\bar{x}$ = 4.07), which was slightly lower than the average of 5 reported for adults elsewhere (GlobalWebIndex, 2014). Reflecting general trends in the use of specific social media sites (e.g. Duggan & Smith, 2013; Ofcom, 2014), Facebook (100%) and Twitter (86%) were most the widely used platforms, followed by LinkedIn (40%) and blogging platforms (40%).

Table 3. Interviewee Network Characteristics (n = 14)

	Network Characteristics		
Interviewee	*Social Media Sites Used*	*FB Friends*	*Twtr Followers*
Jess	FB; Twtr; LI; YT; Pic; 4Sq	-	< 450
Phil	FB, Twtr, LI, 4Sq	-	< 200
Roger	FB, Twtr, LI, Pin, Blog	< 100	> 1000
Suzie	FB, LI	< 150	n/a
Dana	FB, Twtr, LI, MySp, YT, Blog	< 100	< 200
Rose	FB, Twtr, LI, Pin, Blog	< 100	-
Peter	FB, LI, Pin, Blog	< 150	n/a
Cathy	FB, Twtr, Blog	< 350	< 350
Stephanie	FB, Twtr, LI, Pin	< 100	< 50
Pauline	FB, Twtr	< 150	-
Emma	FB, Twtr, LI, Blog	< 350	< 50
David	FB, Twtr, Blog	< 150	> 2500
Will	FB, Twtr, Blog	< 500	< 150
Frances	FB, Twtr, LI, Pic, G+, Acad	-	< 350

Key: FB (Facebook), Twtr (Twitter), LI (LinkedIn), YT (YouTube), MySp (MySpace), Pin (Pinterest), Pic (Picassa), Acad (Academia.edu), G+ (Google Plus), 4sq (FourSquare), Blog

Table 3 also indicates that the majority of employees interviewed had Facebook network sizes of between 100 and 200 friends, roughly in line with the figures reported in academic studies of the site (Wilson et al., 2012). The key exceptions appeared to be the younger adults within the sample - Cathy, Emma, and Will - whose larger Facebook network sizes reflected the median figure of

300 friends reported for young adults by Madden et al. (2013). Most interviewees in the current study exceeded the average of 79 Twitter followers (Madden et al., 2013), with Roger and David – both senior employees with relatively high profiles within their fields - reporting particularly large numbers.

Each of the four main themes identified in the current study are now addressed in turn. The first refers to types of **professionally risky content** identified by employees. In the context of the present analysis, "content" refers to any data shared online by social media users, from text-based "status updates" and tweets, to uploaded or linked images and videos. The following section outlines the key first (**in bold**) and second-order sub-themes subsumed within main theme, as illustrated in Figure 4.

5.3.2 Theme I: Professionally Risky Content

The social media policies analysed in Study 1 highlighted a key contradiction in relation to organisational expectations of "professionally appropriate" use of social media. One the one hand, employees were typically encouraged to present themselves in an honest, open, and authentic manner online, whilst also being required to ensure that their interactions were closely self-regulated and particularly cautious in relation to posting personal views about politics or religion, humorous content, or work-related criticism. Many of these aspects are reflected by an important sub-theme of the current study, in which professional risk appeared to be associated with **expressions of individuality**.

Whilst a number of interviewees noted how social media enabled them to express idealised aspects of their self (Will: "*Sometimes I find myself trying to make sure that I'm not aspiring to become more like my Facebook feed"*), being who they wished to really be in an online context was identified as posing a risk to their professional reputations, and in a number of respects. First, over two-thirds of the interviewees discussed the professional riskiness of expressing personal views upon social media [10, 71%], and in particular, those relating to potentially divisive, political beliefs. For instance, in his role as an academic, Will noted that he had "*some strong political views on certain things, but I don't make*

some of those views very public because I don't want to ostracise particular students." Additionally, Will acknowledged that in doing so, he could also damage his professional reputation by appearing "*intellectually vulnerable*" to his students.

Similarly, David, a senior lecturer within the Social Sciences, acknowledged that, "*some academics feel kind of good about emphasising that aspect of their political beliefs"* but reported feeling uncomfortable doing so himself on the basis that others may ask, *"how can this man possibly teach students?"* Judgments of risk appeared to be complex, however. For instance, Will expressed greater comfort in sharing more "mainstream" political views online, admitting that he spent *"a lot of time linking to feminist articles but, you know, I don't weigh into anything murky.*" For Peter, a senior lecturer within the Arts faculty, his specific academic specialisation in fact required a level of intellectual engagement with political issues, and he had recently extended this to his use of social media. In response, he described having been particularly careful to "*be not too partisan"* when sharing blog posts about his subject area.

Closely self-regulating the expression of personal views was also reflected in terms of sharing posts that involved professional critique. For instance, Frances, a senior lecturer within the faculty of Sciences, described avoiding academic debates upon any forms of social media that portrayed her real name, and would do so only under the guise of a pseudonym unless her "*comment was reinforcing what quite a lot of the mainstream thinks*." Relatedly, just over half of the interviewees [8, 57%] identified the act of publicly criticising their organisation as a particularly professionally risky endeavour. For Dana, a marketing officer based in MU's Science faculty, the line was clear, stating, *"I would never ever put anything on* [social media] *that criticised work".*

This perspective appeared to be less prominent amongst academic employees of MU, however. Both David and Peter identified the propensity for academic colleagues to use social media as a platform for airing grievances with their employer, with the former observing that "*the ratio between their privilege*

and the amount they moan is completely out of kilter with everybody else I know". This was perceived as being an especially unfathomable behaviour upon largely public platforms like Twitter (David: "*I don't understand colleagues who piss on their own employer publicly."*), though also within more private online spaces, with Peter acknowledging that "*Facebook provides a wonderful space for that. But… we are very aware that this is not a private forum entirely. I could identify ten occasions last year probably where I, or others have said, 'we shouldn't be saying this'.*"

A smaller number of employees [3, 21%] described how criticising other individuals or organisations had posed a risk to their professional reputation, and particularly for academics like Will, whose honest critique of others' work had become an integral part of his professional presence upon social media. In one particular instance, he recalled how the director of a local arts production had discovered a critical review that Will had written in response to it, and had subsequently complained to the University. Unsure of how best to manage the situation, Will admitted that he eventually "*shattered all integrity and went back and edited the blog*", though not without concluding that,

> *"If part of our job as academics is to have integrity to our beliefs, our opinions, to our readings, and yet that professional context is imposing itself because of the interconnectedness of using social media to do this, then it becomes difficult.*"

Similarly, Roger, a senior administrator and relatively high profile blogger and Twitter user within his professional field, acknowledged the need for caution when posting any content that could be perceived as negative. However, he recalled reacting on social media to one news story that had left him feeling "*appalled*" and to which he published a "*really sarcastic blog post about it… it was just really kind of drippingly sarcastic*". Following a threat of legal action from the target of his post, Roger decided to keep the post online, but removed the sarcastic tone. Indeed, numerous employees [6, 43%] identified the professional risk associated with the use of humour online, including Phil, a

senior manager within central marketing, who described posting a humorous response to a tweet shared by a respected business journal on Twitter, quickly realising that *"there's a level of inappropriateness but it should be alright. I thought 'it's ok, it's ok. It'll get by'."*

For employees like David, who had developed a professional persona upon social media in which humour had become an integral component, there appeared to be a constant awareness of courting risk in relation to his professional reputation ("*You've got to be careful with humour, boy do you have to be careful. But that is my natural voice and is one that I now use more for academic communication."*) Indeed, as noted by Peter, *"you have to be very careful about being ironic, or joking, or, you know, modestly self-effacing on social media, because you can be misunderstood."* Nevertheless, despite adopting a cautious approach in his own online interactions, Will highlighted the paradoxical nature of professional risk through his observation that "*the people who really achieve on social media are the ones who post controversial - well, not controversial - but who really make their stance.*"

In recent years, the concept of **oversharing** has entered common parlance to refer to the act of disclosing greater amounts of detail about one's personal life on social media than might otherwise be shared in person (e.g. Agger, 2015). For almost four-fifths of the employees interviewed, oversharing was identified as both a common source of annoyance and professional risk [11, 79%]. As noted by Cathy, based within central marketing, "*I've seen people at work who've put things on* [Twitter] *and I look at them in a completely different light than I used to.*" Similarly, Will described a friend on Facebook who was currently working on her PhD and possessed a social network that contained both friends and professional acquaintances. Specifically, he indicated that, "*the confessional nature of her statuses is actually quite scary in terms of how she's presenting herself to people within her professional networks. She actually says a lot of stuff that I don't want to know about her when I know her through a work context."*

However, a number of employees reported that sharing aspects of their private life provided "*a little bit of texture*" to their otherwise carefully constructed online personas. For instance, Roger reported occasionally using Twitter to talk about his children or his interest in football, feeling comfortable in doing so because they represented what he felt to be "*fairly superficial*" aspects of private life. Similarly, Cathy acknowledged the potential professional benefits of sharing aspects of personal information on Twitter, observing that "*the best reaction I get for stuff is when a little bit of myself goes into it*", whilst admitting to being "*afraid of oversharing and putting too much personal stuff on*". Indeed, for Roger, a clear line was drawn with regards to disclosing information about his emotions, noting, "*I rarely disclose how I feel about something because I rarely talk about it anyway, so why would I suddenly adopt a different persona?*"

A third sub-theme touched upon by around two-fifths of the interviewees the professional risk associated with the **behaviour of other users** [6, 43%]. As with a number of the interviewees, Peter expressed particular frustration with being tagged in photos on Facebook by friends, when he was otherwise careful about which images he would allow to be shared with others. For other interviewees, professionally risky content was not created by known friends or peers, but complete strangers looking to "troll", or behave "*in a deceptive, destructive, or disruptive manner in a social setting on the Internet with no apparent instrumental purpose*" (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014, p. 1). This issue appeared to be particularly problematic for employees with more prominent presences on social media.

For instance, Will described having encountered "*some quite unnecessary criticism*" in the comments section of a blog post written for the online version of a national newspaper, and that could no longer be removed or responded to. Indeed, due to the specific nature of his academic specialisation, Will had become aware that his blogs were increasingly attracting the attention of conspiracy theory "*nutters … demanding to know why I'm concealing the truth and whatnot*" and had subsequently become frustrated with work becoming

"*hijacked by the people who have the time, energy, and zeal to pursue a particular kind of thing.*" Similarly, Roger described an individual that had been assuming different personas on his professional blog over a sustained period of time, eventually admitting that, "*this one particular individual, I just refuse to publish now… Why would I allow someone to use my blog to attack the University? I'm not going to do it. I'm just going to ignore it."*

As proposed by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013), however, content represents just one element of boundary management upon social media. The following section now turns to address the second in the form of audience, and in particular, the second main theme of professionally risky connections upon social media.

5.3.3 Theme II: Professionally Risky Connections

All of the employees interviewed emphasised the professional risk associated with forming **connections with professional others** upon social media platforms where members of other social groups were co-present. With most employees reporting relatively sizable social media ecologies of around four sites (see Table 3), one prevalent strategy of boundary management reported was to use different platforms to represent different aspects of identity. For instance, Frances described distributing her digital presence across eight platforms because "*there just isn't one site that does everything that I want. There's a bit of stuff on Academia.edu, there's a bit of stuff on Twitter and there's a bit on Facebook.*" Indeed, Frances' compartmentalisation of the personal and professional facets of her digital identity across different sites was also reflected by many employees, including David who described how "*Twitter and blogging* [sites] *are predominantly professional, and Facebook predominantly personal."*

However, acknowledging that "*with all these social media things, friends become a bit of a loose definition",* David and many of his MU colleagues described the ease with which "*waters get very muddied*" upon social media. For academic employees in particular, Facebook networks were typically described as including work-based connections, including colleagues at the University and

professional peers previously encountered at conferences. For Will, developing these connections was beneficial, providing "*a way of sharing information… we share calls for papers, we share interesting links, resources which come out, that kind of thing"* and subsequently, his Facebook network had gradually "*evolved into integrating my academic friends as well."* Similarly, Frances admitted that she had tried "*to keep Facebook primarily for friends and family and Twitter primarily for academics, but the split never works out like that*."

Indeed, these distinct social spheres would sometimes unexpectedly cross over. For instance, Cathy recalled a blog that she had started as a way of embracing her interests in creative writing and the arts. She had decided to make the blog publicly accessible, despite it directly addressing a particularly personal topic through which she had disclosed personal views, emotions, and aspects of sensitive information. After her MU colleagues had discovered her blog one day, Cathy noted that, "*It is weird being at work and knowing that people have read all of those personal things about you. It's strange.*" Nevertheless, rather than posing a threat to her professional reputation, she felt that it had presented a range of beneficial professional consequences, including helping to break down pre-existing "silos" within her office and enabling others to gain an insight into a more confident aspect of her personality.

For the most part, however, the co-presence of personal and professional connections within the same online space appeared to necessitate a cautious approach. In particular, acknowledging the difficulties in maintaining clear personal and professional boundaries online, many of the academics interviewed reported a heightened awareness of how their actions upon social media might influence their professional reputation amongst colleagues and peers. For instance, Will described how he had become increasingly aware that a number of colleagues within his Facebook network would be applying for the same permanent academic post he had recently seen advertised. Subsequently, he reported how he found it difficult to post about the stresses he was currently experiencing "*because actually, the more I say about in terms of how I'm*

getting on in my job, the more advantage it gives my competitors who are my friends."

Whilst an obvious solution would simply be to ignore or reject requests to connect from colleagues, a number of employees discussed the potential difficulties in doing so - particularly when received from influential peers. Indeed, as discussed by Skeels and Grudin (2009) and Lampinen et al. (2009), the social etiquette of handling Facebook friendship requests from more senior professional peers can present employees with a particularly tricky dilemma. Even within her managerial position, Stephanie appeared unsure as to the right solution, admitting, "*I mean it's hard for somebody to ask to be your friend and to say 'no' to your boss. What do you do?*" Similarly, Frances discussed a recurring situation in which she would receive Facebook friend requests after conferences and have to think, *"you're a great academic, but I don't think I really want to be Facebook friends with you… But you sort of slightly feel as though it would be rude to say no with some of these things."*

For employees within professional services roles, managing friendship requests on Facebook typically involved an "all-or-nothing" approach in which it was safer to adopt the latter in relation to requests from subordinates (Suzie: *"It sounds awful but as long as you keep them all out… I think it's easier to make that distinction if you're the manager."*), and current colleagues. Though numerous studies have hinted at the reticence of students to interact with staff upon Facebook (e.g. Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Madge et al., 2009), this appeared not to be the case for many interviewees who had received friendship requests from MU students. Without exception, all interviewees emphasised the importance of maintaining professional distance between themselves and students at MU by declining such requests on Facebook, although some were aware of being followed upon Twitter. For Will, this meant being particularly cautious about sharing critical feedback with students online, observing that "*once something is written down, it has an authority which looks intractable.*"

So far, two main themes have been discussed with regards to the professional riskiness of content shared and connecting with professional others in online spaces that feature different social groups. The chapter now turns to the third of the four main themes identified, outlining the strategies adopted by employees to manage risk to professional reputation upon social media.

5.3.4 Theme III: Digital Reputation Management

The most prevalent strategy of digital reputation management discussed by employees was in **self-regulating their interactions** with social media. All employees [14, 100%] highlighted the need to think carefully about the potential professional consequences of their online actions prior to publishing. One of the key drivers in MU employees adopting a cautious, common sense approach appeared to be limiting the potential damage to not only their own professional reputation, but that of their employer too. As noted by marketing officer, Jess, "*I'm just always cautious that, especially with the Twitter account, you don't do anything that will portray the University in a bad light.*" Similarly, David remarked, *"I am always careful on either a blog or on Twitter for it not to be something that could cause embarrassment to the institution.*"

From Roger's perspective as a senior administrator, avoiding damage to the reputation of the university appeared to be primarily about adopting a "*general sense of discipline and conduct, which is nothing to do with the medium itself - it's about behaviour."* Indeed, reflecting a core element of the organisational social media policies analysed in Study 1 (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1), the most prominent approach discussed by almost three-fifths of the interviewees [8, 57%] was to apply "common sense" when sharing content on social media. For many, this was a case of "*just being sensible*", or, as senior administrator Roger noted, "*'Don't be stupid' would be the three word advice to anyone.*" For others, like marketing officer, Cathy, a common sense approach involved considering multiple aspects where "*there's no specific process but intuition, not hurting anybody and not getting myself into trouble at work."*

For just over two-fifths of the MU employees interviewed [6, 43%] a key aspect to self-regulating behaviour upon social media was in managing emotional states when posting. For instance, Suzie outlined her approach of "*not posting if you're feeling emotional about anything … just calm down and put your status the next day.*" A number of employees appeared to draw a link between adopting such an approach and their predispositions towards being a cautious "type" of person. These perspectives appeared to indicate a potentially important role for individual differences in personality, as indicated by Moore and McElroy (2012) and Karl et al. (2010). In particular, conscientiousness and impulsiveness were consistently conveyed by interviewees, as illustrated by Rose, who described herself as being "*extremely over-analytical, and I can talk myself out of things",* further acknowledging that *"when I have done something just on the spur of the moment, it's caused problems!"*

Nevertheless, adopting a cautious approach appeared to present drawbacks for some of the MU employees interviewed. For instance, Emma described how she would typically take up to 15 minutes to consider the professional appropriateness of posts she intended to share on Twitter, despite acknowledging that *"the whole point of social media is that it should be free flowing and be creative, and, you know, responsive.*" Similarly, some interviewees described how excessively restricting and self-censoring their content upon social media could actually limit their opportunities to build a positive professional reputation online. As described by Will, "*When you're trying to bear all these things in mind, you can actually end up coming across quite anodyne. One of my students joked the other day, 'oh, you just post about work all the time on your Twitter feed' and I'm like… Yeah, I do.*"

In contrast, a number of the academic interviewees appeared to embrace the notion of Facebook as a "*safe space*" (Seidman, 2013), where the need to closely self-regulate actions was less salient. In part, this perception appeared to be influenced by the privacy controls in place. As outlined by Will, "*it's the safest one for me because it is a closed account*". Nevertheless, some employees, such as

David, emphasised the limitations of such a perspective, noting that "*even if* [others] *have protected their stuff, people can get in. They can take screenshots. I mean it's not that bloody safe.*" Subsequently, David described continuing to subscribe to the adage of "*don't write anything that you wouldn't want to see on the front page of the Daily Mail"*, despite his Facebook network consisting predominantly of non-work based friends.

With regards to managing behaviours that had already been shared online, a second sub-theme related to the various behavioural strategies for **monitoring and modifying existing content** upon social media. Indeed, less than one-third of the interviewees [4, 29%] indicated some reticence in deleting posts from their profiles. As noted by marketing officer, Jess, "*there's a few things that I've written that I was a bit embarrassed about, but I've never deleted stuff."* For Peter, however, if content was perceived to be risky enough to require deletion, he ensured that "*when I do it, I do it immediately*". Similarly, Emma, an Alumni Relations officer, acknowledged having removed content on the basis of the persistent nature of data on social media (e.g. boyd, 2014; Ellison & boyd, 2013; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009), recalling, "*I've gone back and deleted posts. I know that you can't amend things on Twitter once they're out there. It's either delete them or live with it really."*

Indeed, whilst seemingly counterintuitive, the "living with it" approach of choosing to do nothing about potentially risky content was outlined by a number of interviewees. As discussed by senior administrator, Roger, "*the issue is: how do you use social media to respond? Or indeed, choose not to respond of course, because it's very easy to fuel a fire by responding.*" Indeed, some interviewees observed that deleting or modifying posts could actually represent potentially riskier strategies than simply ignoring them. As outlined by Roger,

> *"You can build up momentum behind something and before you know it, you're bloody trending and you're stuffed then aren't you? So you often find you're just accepting things and hope they go away, because people will move on to something else."*

For the academic interviewees in particular, the persistence of data upon social media enabled them to monitor their professional reputation. For instance, senior lecturer David acknowledged the self-promotional utility of Twitter and its value as a means for communicating and sharing ideas relating to research ("*It's a brilliant, brilliant exercise in forcing you to write.*"), though reported being reluctant to engage with Facebook. Nevertheless, he found himself registering *"because some students set up a group about me and the only way I could see what the little fuckers were saying was to join… It wasn't too bad. In fact, it was sort of quite nice in some ways."* In contrast, however, Peter viewed the use of Facebook to monitor student conversations as introducing too much risk into the student-teacher relationship, describing those who did as *"misguided colleagues"*, regardless of the potential for discovering ego-boosting comments.

The ability to monitor the actions of others also reinforced discussions around one of the most prominent sub-themes in the study, with interviewees outlining their specific strategies of **personal-professional boundary management**. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most prevalent strategy reported by interviewees using Facebook [14, 100%] was to set the privacy controls so that only approved "Friends" could view content upon the profile. For Phil, a senior marketing manager, his approach was to "*lock up my profile about as tight as I can get it"*, while others, such as Jess, described paying particular attention to any changes made to the platform's default settings, observing that "*it just seems to happen, which makes me a little bit wary*". A similar point was also echoed by Peter, who recounted that every time he noticed that the settings had changed, "*I try to go back and make sure that it's still damn well private, regardless of what Facebook actually wants."*

For the employees willing to accept friendship requests on Facebook from colleagues or peers [8, 57%], choosing which specific individuals to let into their network appeared to be a particularly important facet of digital reputation management. Seemingly central to this decision was the notion of trust, with Jess

noting, *"for me, it's a judgement call about who you can trust and who you feel comfortable sharing that information with… It's just kind of having really clear boundaries, especially with Facebook, around who you kind of connect with."* Reflecting the preceding discussion of Facebook as a relatively "safe space", Emma described how "*now that I've locked down my Facebook, I am free to say a lot more and post a lot more"*, while Will similarly described his mixed network of friends and academic peers on Facebook account as his *"safe audience* [where] *I feel fairly able to kind of say whatever I want to on there, as long as I'm not too suicidal.*"

Although few interviewees described already having implemented it as a strategy, a small number discussed considering the possibility of creating separate personal and professional profiles on both Facebook and Twitter. For instance, Jess described a colleague who was successfully managing two different Facebook profiles, where "*with her personal one its just her friends, then with her work one its colleagues but also people she's met through work and things like that."* Interpreting it to be *"quite a good idea"*, other colleagues of Jess, such as Phil, were more sceptical of the strategy, arguing that the personal and professional spheres of social life were eventually "*going to come together anyway*". Similarly, Cathy described the difficulties experienced by her partner, who managed three separate Twitter accounts and subsequently "*kind of forgets whose following which, and has to Tweet as different people. It's all a bit weird really.*"

With various digital reputation management strategies outlined in this section, the chapter now turns to the fourth and final main theme in the study, which represented factors that appeared to influence professionally risky behaviour amongst employees using social media.

5.3.5 Theme IV: Factors Influencing Professionally Risky Behaviour

A key risk factor was that for almost all of the interviewees [13, 93%], social media appeared to play a **core role in supporting their professional activity** at MU. Whether using LinkedIn for recruiting new members of staff, or Twitter

to promote the university or department and engage with communities outside of the institution, the experiences recounted by interviewees strongly supported the notion that social media has become increasingly integrated throughout HEIs (Kent & Leaver, 2014). For instance, the changes were most apparent for David in how he now disseminated his research, describing how "*whenever we'd put something on the blog, I would email it to loads of journalists. I don't bother anymore, I just put it on Twitter a few times.*" Additionally, Cathy emphasised how her use of Twitter had played an essential role in developing her professional reputation, admitting, *"If I lost it now… I don't know how I would do it."*

Additionally, many of the interviewees discussed the increasingly central role of social media in interacting with students. For instance, senior administrator, Roger, described the technologies as being ideal "*as a vehicle for engaging with students to enable* [MU] *to recruit more and better students*", particularly as the "liberalism" of higher education presented a "*freedom to actually use the benefits of social media to engage more meaningfully with students.*" Nevertheless, the statutory rights of academic employees to "academic freedom" of speech (Universities UK, 2011) appeared to be interpreted by many employees as more an ambitious ideal in the context of social media, rather than a practical reality. As described in the preceding sections, most academic employees closely self-regulated the content shared and connections formed upon social media regardless of the legislation, seeming aware of the institution's commercial interests as well as representing "*crucibles of debate*".

Intriguingly, the perceptions and management of professional risk relayed by interviewees did not appear to be influenced by familiarity with the institution's social media guidelines for employee use of Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. Indeed, despite being broadly aware of their existence, only one of the fourteen interviewees [7%] admitted to having read the documents. Given the cautious and at times, complex strategies of digital reputation management applied by the interviewees, the role of "common sense" and professional

experience appeared to be more influential in determining professionally appropriate behaviour upon social media than knowledge of any specific organisational guidelines. Indeed, senior manager, Suzie, underscored this point, noting that, "*I think if you've got common sense there within the team, actually wafting guidelines around is quite insulting.*"

Reflecting the bodies of social computing literature reviewed in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4), a second risk factor related to the **affordances of social media**. With respect to the visibility of data online, all interviewees reported using Facebook's privacy controls to limit access to friends only, but the complexity involved in fully understanding how they worked appeared to lead many interviewees to feel confused about the actual visibility of their content. As illustrated by Jess, "*Even if you're not friends with somebody, if someone tags you in a photo then you know, there's so many things to think about… it's just a bit of a minefield.*" Additionally, some employees such as Dana discussed lacking trust in the settings, noting that "*now I have family, friends and work colleagues on there, I'm never 100 percent sure who can see what.*"

A small number of employees also expressed concern in relation to the virality of content upon social media (Stephanie: "*The ways things can just go viral, a tiny little thing - it just takes over*"), although the most prevalent affordance discussed by employees was that of persistence, or durability (boyd, 2014; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). For some interviewees, the permanent nature of their social interactions provided beneficial opportunities for recording special moments or reflecting on personal changes, but for most, it was discussed in terms of creating professional risk. As noted by Will after discovering that some of his teenage blogs were still active and accessible, "*permanency is a big problem".* Indeed, Frances discussed how "*once you've put the thing up there, you know it's going to be there forever*", and that subsequently, she only commented on issues if she could do so anonymously *"because who knows, in 10 years time if they're still there, some big fuss may be made about them.*"

5.4 DISCUSSION

The experiences relayed by the fourteen university employees interviewed in the current study contributed towards addressing the previously outlined research questions in a number of ways. With respect to the first research question (**RQ_{2a}**), the employees interviewed appeared to define professionally risky behaviour when using social media in two particular forms: first, through the type of content shared online, and second, through connecting with work-related others in online spaces where members of distinct social groups were co-present. With respect to the former, the findings appeared to be in line with the, albeit limited, body of literature outlining the professional risk associated with posts that are critical of work, express extreme emotions, overshare personal information, convey personal opinions or views on politics or religion, and are profane or overtly argumentative (Root & McKay, 2014; Sleeper, Balebako, et al., 2013; Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al., 2013; Y. Wang et al., 2011).

A key theme identified in the analysis of social media policies presented in Study 1 was the seemingly contradictory organisational expectation for employees to demonstrate integrity, openness, and authenticity, whilst also closely self-regulating their online actions to reduce professional risk. The current study presented rich and detailed evidence of the complex task facing employees in conforming to this professional expectation. Specifically, illustrations were provided of employees for whom behaviours acknowledged as posing a risk to professional reputation, such as use of humour or engaging in professional critique, had become an important part of their online personas and indeed, had helped them to develop a positive professional reputation through social media. For these employees, use of social media appeared to demand a highly self-regulated approach that involved careful consideration of the possible professional consequences.

The perceived importance of this level of vigilance even appeared to supersede the right to "academic freedom" to express unpopular or controversial opinions without sanction (Universities UK, 2011). This statutory

right to free speech ordinarily provides academics with the latitude to engage in the professional discussion of potentially controversial topics, yet most of the academic employees interviewed reported avoiding doing so online as frequently as their colleagues within professional services roles. Indeed, a recent case reported by Parr (2014) described how one UK-based academic expert in political analysis had been reprimanded by her university for posting tweets that criticised the policies of the UK Home Secretary. In this respect, social media appear to pose a significant challenge with respect to how HEIs must address the potential tensions between their commercial and academic areas of focus online.

For the second type of professionally risky behaviour identified, all employees discussed the issues presented by connecting with work-related others upon sites where other distinct social groups were co-present. This was identified as being a particularly difficult issue for academic interviewees using Facebook, who described having accepted many of their peers and colleagues within their network, whilst their counterparts in professional services roles tended to reject Facebook friend requests from current colleagues and enforce stricter approaches to boundary management online. Reflecting the findings from preceding research on the co-presence of social groups or life modes upon social media (e.g. Binder et al., 2009; Lampinen et al., 2009; Ozenc & Farnham, 2011; Skeels & Grudin, 2009), many of the interviewees reported feeling uncomfortable with blurring personal and professional boundaries, and particularly in cases where they felt pressured to accept requests from colleagues or peers in superior roles.

With regards to the second research question (**RQ_{2b}**), employees described using a range of strategies to manage risk to their professional reputation upon social media. First, personal and professional boundaries were primarily maintained on Facebook through the use of privacy settings, blocking unwanted audiences by restricting the visibility of their online content to only friends known within an offline context, and therefore reflecting previous research (e.g. Ellison et al., 2007; Joinson, 2008; Lampe et al., 2006). For

colleagues, employees described adopting a case-by-case judgment of trust, accepting only those who they felt comfortable sharing personal information with. Subsequently, many interviewees conveyed the perception of Facebook as providing a relatively "safe" space for interaction, echoing Seidman's (2013) similar finding for individuals using the site to explore hidden and ideal self-aspects.

With Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective on impression management providing an influential theoretical framework for examining digital identity and self-presentation upon social media (e.g. boyd, 2007; Hogan, 2010; X. Zhao et al., 2013), some researchers have sought to explain perceptions of safety upon Facebook through the concept of the back stage, or region (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008). Defined by Goffman (1959, p. 112) as "*a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course*", there are issues with such an interpretation, however. In particular, Hogan (2010) argues that an interactional space considered to be private, or "safe", is not necessarily the same as the "back region" in which individuals "*can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude*" (Goffman, 1959, p. 114) and can conduct performances that might otherwise be inappropriate for the audience in the "front region".

Indeed, many of the interviewees in the current study who described their perception of Facebook in terms of relative "safety" nevertheless reported continuing to closely self-regulate their interactions upon the site. This suggests that the binary distinction between front and back regions may be insufficient for representing the complexity of self-presentation behaviour upon social media, and indeed, reinforces the notion of Facebook as a "network public" (Ellison & boyd, 2013). In particular, the persistence, visibility, and accessibility of social interactions upon social media (e.g. boyd, 2014; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009) mean that no matter how cautious the use of privacy settings or acceptance of connections into one's Facebook network, employees typically

appeared to understand that controls could be breached and professional risk continued to be a concern.

Another prominent strategy of managing professional risk related to the careful self-regulation of interactions with social media. Echoing a key theme identified in Study 1, employees described adopting a "common sense" approach that involved thinking carefully about the possible professional consequences of content prior to posting. In addition to avoiding impulsive posts and self-censoring content prior to publication (e.g. Das & Kramer, 2013; Lampinen et al., 2009; Sleeper, Balebako, et al., 2013), interviewees described a range of approaches to both monitoring and modifying existing content, from the immediate deletion of undesirable content (e.g. Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2008; Y. Wang et al., 2011), to deciding to do nothing. Though seemingly counterintuitive, this latter approach was adopted to avoid attracting further unwanted attention to the content.

One particular factor indicated in the analysis that may influence the perception and management of professionally risky behaviour was the role of individual differences in personality. Similar to the organisational expectations conveyed by the findings of Study 1, most employees interviewed in the current study emphasised the importance of interacting with social media in ways that reflected a conscientious, considered, and emotionally stable approach, with sensitivity to the specific social situation and vigilance of how actions might be perceived by professional others. With empirical evidence indicating a potential role for individual differences in personality in predicting regretful and professionally risky posts on Twitter and Facebook (Karl et al., 2010; Moore & McElroy, 2012; Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al., 2013; Y. Wang et al., 2011), the current study supports the need for further research in this area.

Finally, the findings of this study illustrated the increasing pervasiveness of social media within academic and administrative job roles in HEIs, and subsequently, how this in itself appears to be a key factor influencing professionally risky behaviour. Specifically, many interviewees emphasised the

key roles of Twitter and blogging platforms in communicating their work, promoting the university, and interacting with a diverse range of audiences including students, colleagues, peers, journalists, and the general public. In doing so, the affordances of social media could be harnessed to build their professional reputation on an unprecedentedly large scale, but paradoxically, the behaviours used to convey individuality and popularity amongst followers often appeared to be the very same that increased the risk of damaging their employability.

5.5 CONCLUSIONS

This study illustrated how social media is playing an increasingly important role in both the personal and professional lives of university employees, and in doing so, places an important responsibility upon individuals to actively manage the professional risk associated with their digital presence. In combination with the findings of Study 1, the study presented in this chapter emphasised the vital roles of carefully self-regulating self-expression upon social media in relation to a professional audience, and controlling the access that such an audience has to personal content in the first instance. In doing so, employees are faced with a complex and often paradoxical task, in which honest and authentic online behaviours can have profoundly beneficial professional consequences for the employee and their employer, whilst simultaneously leaving their professional reputations vulnerable to lasting damage.

With almost two-thirds of the employees interviewed in the current study possessing more than ten years of professional experience and having started using social media whilst already mature adults, it is perhaps unsurprising that most appeared to have found successful strategies to negotiate the complexity of digital reputation management. In contrast, however, future workforces will consist of young adults that have “grown up digital” (Tapscott, 1998, 2008), likely to have amassed substantial online social networks and digital footprints before they even enter the workplace. For this cohort, organisational expectations of “professional appropriate” online behaviour may

not be readily apparent, nor the subtle complexities of knowing when and how to respond to online incidents that pose a potential risk to professional reputation.

The findings of Studies 1 and 2 highlighted the importance for employees to consider the professional consequences of their interactions upon social media, even when ostensibly personal in nature. For young adults with social networks consisting primarily of friends, and professional audiences a distant concern, this may prove to be a particularly challenging task. Additionally, the conscientious, socially sensitive, emotionally balanced, and agreeable forms of online behaviour expected by organisations of their employees suggest that individual differences in personality may be an important factor influencing professionally risky online behaviour. With Chapter 2 outlining the prevalence of this behaviour amongst young adults, the following study investigates whether individual differences in personality affect the extent to which students consider the professional riskiness of their interactions with social media.

6

STUDY 3: PREDICTING STUDENT CONSIDERATION OF PROFESSIONAL CONSEQUENCES ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

6.1 INTRODUCTION

A consistent theme identified in both Studies 1 and 2 was the need for employees to carefully self-regulate and consider the professional consequences of their interactions with social media. The core objective of this was to convey a "professionally appropriate" identity online that would present minimal risk to both their own professional reputation and that of their employer. Study 2, in particular, demonstrated how employees use strategies that focus on both the management of content and audience in order to achieve this goal. Less clear, however, is the extent to which young adults engage in these types of reputation management behaviours prior to entering the workplace, even though the persistence, visibility, and accessibility of data upon social media introduces the possibility that online social interactions may in the future be taken out of context and used to influence judgments within a professional context.

The increasing prevalence of social recruiting, in which employers use social media to covertly screen and assess job applicants (e.g. V. R. Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Davison et al., 2011; Jobvite, 2014b; Kluemper, 2013), presents a stark illustration of why young adults need to consider the professional appropriateness of their digital presence prior to making the college-to-work transition. With its cost-effectiveness and potential for informing accurate recruiter assessments of personality (e.g. Kluemper & Rosen, 2009; Kluemper et al., 2012), the appeal of social recruiting appears unlikely to diminish in the near future, despite mixed evidence in support of its validity as a predictor of work-based performance (Van Iddekinge et al., 2013). Subsequently, the responsibility

of understanding professional norms of social media use, and self-regulating online behaviour accordingly, is at present placed firmly upon young adults as they approach organisational entry.

As outlined previously in Chapter 2, a nascent body of empirical research has presented evidence indicating that young adults engage in many of the risky behaviours identified by organisations and employees in Studies 1 and 2, despite seemingly being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences (e.g. R. Miller et al., 2010; Peluchette & Karl, 2007; Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al., 2013; Y. Wang et al., 2011). One potential factor as to why this may be relates to individual differences in personality. Indeed, various aspects of personality have been found to predict self-disclosure behaviours on social media. For instance, individuals with lower trait scores of neuroticism have been found to spend less time using Facebook (Moore & McElroy, 2012), be less likely to post photos of themselves (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010), and be willing to share personally-identifying information (C. Ross et al., 2009).

Seidman (2013) also presented evidence indicating that conscientious individuals were typically more cautious in their online self-presentation, while less neurotic users engaged in fewer general and emotional self-disclosures, and greater agreeableness was negatively associated with attention-seeking behaviour. Similarly, Karl et al. (2010) indicated that lower levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness, and higher levels of neuroticism, were found to predict greater likelihood of sharing professionally inappropriate posts on Facebook, while Moore and McElroy (2012) found that higher agreeableness and conscientiousness, and lower neuroticism, were related to greater levels of regret over posting potentially inappropriate content.

Indeed, the potential role of individual differences in personality was also reflected in the findings of Studies 1 and 2. Specifically, the emphasis applied by both organisations and employees on carefully considered interactions with social media indicated the professional desirability of high conscientiousness and low impulsiveness, where self-discipline, responsibility, and consideration

of consequences are key (e.g. Barratt, 1959; Costa & McCrae, 1992a; Stanford et al., 2009). Similarly, organisational expectations that employees would be courteous and convey trustworthiness whilst avoiding hostile and emotionally charged reactions suggested the desirability of high agreeableness and low neuroticism, whilst sensitivity to social context conveyed by a number of employees in their approaches to managing professional risk suggested a potential role for high self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974).

With many of these personality variables yet to be examined empirically with respect to their potential influence on the extent to which young adults consider the professional consequences of their behaviour on social media, the first research question posed in the current study was,

RQ$_{3a}$: *Do individual differences in personality affect the extent to which young adults approaching the college-to-work transition consider the professional consequences of their actions on social media?*

In particular, based upon the findings discussed previously, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1a: *Higher self-reported levels of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and self-monitoring will predict more frequent consideration of professional consequences amongst young adult users of social media.*

H1b: *Higher self-reported levels of impulsiveness and neuroticism will predict less frequent consideration of professional consequences amongst young adult users of social media.*

Regardless of these predicted relationships, a number of studies have indicated that the influence of individual differences in personality on social media behaviours may not be as important as some have proposed. For instance, C. Ross et al. (2009), Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky (2010), and Seidman (2013) provided examples in which the relationships between personality domains and social media use were statistically insignificant, or effect sizes relatively small. Moore and McElroy (2012) and Seidman (2013) propose that this may have been due to measuring self-reported behaviours rather than

actual usage of social media, although it may also be that individual differences in more context-specific measures of social media use represent better predictors of the extent to which young adults consider the professional consequences of their actions. Subsequently, the second research question of this study was,

RQ_{3b}: *Do individual differences in the self-regulation of social media use affect the extent to which young adults approaching the college-to-work transition consider the professional consequences of online actions?*

With the absence of existing measures addressing the self-regulation of social media use, and the limited relevance of scales adapted to measure online self-presentation tactics (e.g. Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011), three scale-based measures were developed for the purpose of the current study (see Section 6.2.2 for more details). These measures related to the self-regulation of impulsive actions ("Self-Regulatory Control"), the avoidance of behaviours that might convey a negative image ("Prevention of Threats to Reputation"), and the expression of professionally desirable behaviours ("Professional Self-Promotion"). On the basis that a more considered approach to self-regulating interactions with social media might be expected to be positively associated with greater consideration of professional consequences, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: *Controlling for individual differences in personality, greater self-regulatory control, prevention of threats to reputation, and professional self-promotion will predict more frequent consideration of professional consequences amongst young adult users of social media.*

In contrast to examining the role of individual differences, this study also investigated the notion that temporal proximity to the point of organisational entry may influence the extent to which young adults consider the professional consequences of their online actions. As noted by Emler (1990, p. 175), "*Defining yourself in terms of a particular social identity is largely a matter of persuading*

others to so define you". So it follows that as students approach graduation and the point of preparing for organisational entry, the motivation to emphasise the professional aspects of their social identity online may be anticipated to be greater than in earlier years of study. This may be particularly so given that students have been found to be largely aware of prospective employers viewing the social media profiles of job applicants (Root & McKay, 2014). As such, the third research question was,

RQ$_{3c}$: *Does temporal distance to organisational entry affect the extent to which young adults approaching the college-to-work transition consider their professional reputation on social media?*

In one of the few empirical studies to address a similar research question, R. Miller et al. (2010) found cursory evidence to suggest that first year undergraduate students appeared less concerned about the presence of a professional audience than their final year counterparts, although the difference was not found to be statistically significant in their relatively restricted sample. Predicting a similar trend in the current study, therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3a: *Controlling for individual differences in personality and self-regulation of social media use, undergraduate students in their final year will report considering the professional consequences of their online actions more frequently than those at earlier stages of study.*

Additionally, it may also be expected that the closer a student is to making the college-to-work transition, the greater the likelihood that they will have engaged in strategies to modify content and the access of audiences upon their social media profiles, as demonstrated by the employees interviewed in Study 2 (see Chapter 5, Section 5.3.4). Indeed, Madden (2012) found that two-fifths of young adults surveyed had deleted comments and photo "tags" contributed by others on their social media profile, while two-thirds had deleted people from their profile. Furthermore, Jobvite (2014b) found that two-fifths of the young adults within their study had modified their social media profile at

some point during the job search process. With this in mind, the final hypothesis proposed in this study was:

H3b: *Undergraduate students in their final year of study will report having used a greater number of profile modification strategies than those at earlier stages of study.*

6.2 DESIGN

This study used a cross-sectional, online survey method to collect self-report data from sixth form college and university students based in the UK. The first and second hypotheses involved a hierarchical multiple regression analysis that included the independent variables (IVs) of personality (**H1a** and **H1b**: *impulsivity, self-monitoring, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and neuroticism*) and self-regulation of social media use (**H2**: *self-regulatory control, prevention of threats to reputation, and professional self-promotion*), and dependent variable (DV) of *consideration of professional consequences on social media*. The first part of the third hypothesis (**H3a**) involved an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) in which the categorical IV of *stage of study* was examined in relation to the prior DV, and with the aforementioned IVs entered as covariates. The second part (**H3b**) involved a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in which the same categorical IV was examined in relation to two additional DVs of *profile modification strategies used on Facebook and Twitter*. The full details of this study design are now outlined in the following sections.

6.2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 257 full-time students[2] who self-reported using at least one form of social media on a regular basis. With respect to gender, the survey included 94 males (37%) and 160 (62%) females, with 3 respondents (1%) declining to share this information. The mean age of the overall sample was 20.1

[2] 354 respondents started the survey but 97 failed to complete it, leading to a completion rate of 72.6%.

years (SD = 3.3 years), and ranged from 16 to 31 years. Students were sampled at three levels: Sixth Form College students (85, 33%), Undergraduates (128, 50%) and Postgraduates (44, 17%). The rationale for including these three stages of study was based on a key assumption of scale development, whereby the sample should be representative of the population of interest (Hinkin, 1998). By including students from college age to postgraduate study in the initial phase of analysis, perspectives from a range of young adults were represented in the item responses that were subsequently developed into measures used in the study.

An opportunistic sampling approach was adopted that varied slightly for each type of student. Specifically, students at the college level of study were recruited via a gatekeeper based at a single Sixth Form College in South Nottinghamshire. Undergraduate and postgraduate students were recruited in a variety of ways, including through the use of posters and flyers, use of the Research Participation Scheme (RPS) for first and second year Psychology undergraduates at the University of Nottingham, sending emails to University departments, and face-to-face recruitment at a number of campus-based careers fairs. To broaden the sample, a number of social media sites were used to recruit students, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and the "Survey Exchange" section of The Student Room online forum.

Of the 137 students to have disclosed the identity of their institution, the majority reported being based at the University of Nottingham (98, 71.5%), whilst the remainder were recruited from a range of 20 UK universities, including those based in York, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Derby, Reading, Surrey and London (n = 39, 28.5%). Along with the University of Nottingham, many of these institutions were members of the Russell Group (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2), reflecting high standards of research and teaching. In exchange for participating, all respondents were presented with the chance to enter a free, random prize draw for one of ten £20 Amazon.co.uk gift vouchers, which was

made once the survey had closed. The following section now outlines the scales that were developed for use in this study.

6.2.2 Scale Development

Influenced by Hinkin's (1998) comprehensive guidelines for scale development, an initial pool of 25 questionnaire items was created (see Appendix C, Q18). These items were constructed as first-person statements, reflecting a range of the reputation management behaviours outlined in both Studies 1 and 2, including controlling impulsive actions (e.g. '*I find it difficult to avoid swearing in my posts*' - Reversed), considering professional consequences (e.g. *"I delay posting to consider how my actions could influence future career opportunities"*), and monitoring existing content (e.g. *"I look back through my older posts to decide if any could pose a threat to my current image"*). Though no items were adapted directly from existing measures, both Bolino and Turnley (1999) and Lee *et al*'s (1999) impression management scales influenced the phrasing of item statements, the labelling of scale points, and the inclusion of both defensive and assertive aspects of self-presentation.

The 25 items were designed so that respondents rated the frequency with which they typically engaged in the behaviour described, with low scores representing behaviours associated with greater professional risk, and high scores representing lesser professional risk. A 5-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (*Never behave this way*) and 5 (*Always behave this way*) was used, with the remaining semantic labels of *Rarely*, *Sometimes* and *Often* used to represent scale points 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Participants were prompted to base their responses on either their typical use of Facebook or Twitter depending on which they tended to use more frequently, given the strong likelihood that most young adults would have profiles on both (e.g. Duggan et al., 2015). As items were designed to represent non-platform specific interactions with social media (e.g. *"I post first and then deal with any consequences later"*), responses were combined and subjected to principal components analysis (PCA).

Based on the full sample of 257 responses, an initial evaluation of the correlation matrix produced by the PCA indicated four items that shared two or less inter-item correlations greater than .30, and for which most were statistically non-significant. Based on the guidance of Tabachnick and Fidell (2001), these were subsequently removed from the item pool and PCA repeated on the 21 remaining items, using a direct oblimin oblique rotation, given that components would most likely be correlated and, therefore, not independent. Consultation of the 21-item pattern and structure matrices produced revealed three potentially contentious items with primary and secondary cross-loadings that did not meet the .5/.2 or .6/.3 cut-off thresholds proposed by Comrey and Lee (1992). In seeking parsimony and a simple structure (e.g. Thurstone, 1947), these three items were removed from further analysis.

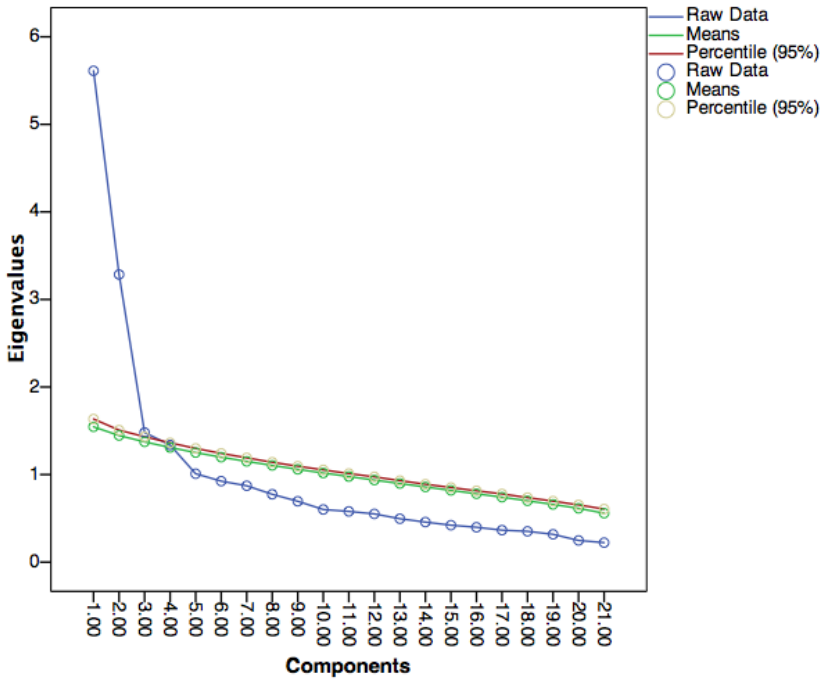


Figure 5. Parallel Analysis Scree Plot of Component Eigenvalues

PCA was re-run for the remaining 18 items. The KMO statistic of .83 supported the sampling adequacy of the analysis, with the value deemed to be "highly acceptable" in relation to the benchmarks offered by Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999). Additionally, KMO values for individual items were greater

than .73, and thus markedly greater than the acceptable limit of .5 proposed by Kaiser (1960). Bartlett's test of sphericity, x^2 (153) = 1749.32, $p < .001$, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA to be conducted. The average communality of the 18 items was .59, and therefore slightly below the .60 threshold proposed by Kaiser (1960) when components number fewer than 30 and sample size exceeds 250. As illustrated by Figure 5, parallel analysis (e.g. O'Connor, 2000) indicated a four component solution, with eigenvalues explaining 58.65% of the total variance.

Table 4 presents the pattern matrix of component loadings produced by the oblique direct oblimin rotation, with those that exceeded the recommended cut-off point of .320 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) indicated in bold. The pattern matrix depicted in the table illustrates a simple, parsimonious structure with the loading coefficients representing unique contributions to their respective components. On the basis of these loadings, the four components were labelled as: [1] Consideration of Professional Consequences, [2] Self-Regulatory Control, [3] Prevention of Threats to Reputation, and [4] Professional Self-Promotion [4]. The interpretation of these components and therefore, the rationale for these specific labels are outlined in greater detail in Sections 6.2.3 and 6.2.4, to follow.

In total, nine independent variables (IVs) were measured in the present study: five relating to aspects of personality, one relating to stage of study, and three to the self-regulation of social media use, as represented by factor loadings 2, 3, 4 in Table 4. Additionally, two dependent variables (DVs) were measured: one relating to the consideration of professional consequences, as represented by component [1] in Table 4, and one to the number of profile modification strategies adopted by social media users. These measures are discussed in more detail in the following sections, with each of the variables represented **in bold**.

Table 4. Pattern Matrix of the PCA: [1] Consideration of Professional Consequences (1 - 4), [2] Self-Regulatory Control (5 - 9), [3] Prevention of Threats to Reputation (10 - 14), and [4] Professional Self-Promotion (15 - 18)

	Pattern Matrix Components			
Statement	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
1. I delay posting to consider how my actions could influence future career opportunities	**-.887**	.038	-.043	.003
2. I avoid posting anything that might cause a potential employer to think that I'm lazy	**-.830**	.057	-.009	.020
3. I take time before posting to consider how a potential employer might judge my actions	**-.815**	.127	.057	.056
4. I spend time evaluating whether past activity on my profile could restrict what I'm able to do next in my career	**-.664**	-.085	.204	.028
5. I post first and then deal with any consequences later (r)	-.095	**.759**	-.114	.155
6. I use my profile as a way of venting any frustrations I have with my work (r)	.012	**.699**	.032	-.151
7. I find it difficult to avoid swearing in my posts (r)	.124	**.648**	.229	.103
8. I post about things that would seem unprofessional if discussed in a face-to-face context (r)	-.021	**.700**	-.021	-.003
9. I find myself posting about whatever I'm angry or upset about at the time (r)	-.162	**.677**	-.004	-.225
10. I hold back from using my profile to comment on things that I feel very strongly about	-.021	.049	**.788**	-.248
11. I hesitate before posting to consider how my actions might affect someone else's image	-.197	-.012	**.668**	.060
12. I avoid posting in a way that might cause others to think of me as a negative person	.090	.198	**.637**	.214
13. I look back through older posts on my profile to decide if any could pose a threat to my current image	-.066	-.099	**.628**	.190
14. Before posting, I try to anticipate its impact on the reputation of groups or organisations I'm associated with	-.288	-.024	**.473**	.111
15. I post about the things I'm working on so that others might judge me to be a hard-worker	.043	-.060	.043	**.797**
16. I use my profile to promote the things I have achieved through my work	-.066	.019	-.074	**.749**
17. I post things to my profile in order to look like a hard worker	-.198	-.116	.009	**.619**
18. I promote the image I have created for myself as if it were a brand	.022	.062	.087	**.587**

6.2.3 Independent Variables

The concept of **self-monitoring** relates to the notion that people differ in the extent that they observe and control their expressive behaviour and self-presentation to express socially appropriate performances (Snyder, 1974). The current study used Lennox and Wolfe's (1984) 13-item revised self-monitoring scale, which prompts respondents to use the 6-point Likert scale to rate the validity of a set of statements, ranging from 1 (*Certainly, Always False*) to 6 (*Certainly, Always True*). In the current study, the composite score indicated a highly acceptable Cronbach's α = .84, which compares favourably with O'Cass' (2000) finding of α = .86 in a psychometric evaluation of the scale.

Impulsiveness is a multifactorial personality construct, defined as "*a predisposition toward rapid, unplanned reactions to internal or external stimuli without regard to the negative consequences of these reactions to the impulsive individuals or to others*" (Moeller, Barratt, Dougherty, Schmitz, & Swann, 2001, p. 1784). The current study used Steinberg, Sharp, Stanford, and Tharp's (2013) 8-item Barratt Impulsiveness Scale-Brief (BIS-Brief) scale; a shorter, unidimensional version of the widely-used Barrett Impulsiveness Scale, using a 4-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (*Rarely/Never*) and 4 (*Almost Always/Always*). The BIS-Brief demonstrated good internal consistency (α = .77) compared to the range of α = .73 and α = .83 in the multiple studies reported by Steinberg et al. (2013).

The current study measured three of the Five Factor Model (FFM) personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992a; McCrae & Costa Jr, 1997), including **conscientiousness,** where higher levels refer to the tendency for individuals to be self-disciplined, responsible, and organised; **agreeableness**, where higher levels refer to the tendency for individuals to be empathetic, compliant, and well-meaning in relation to others; and **neuroticism**, where higher levels refer to emotional instability, public self-consciousness, and difficulty in controlling impulses. All three traits were measured using the relevant 4-item sub-domains of the Mini-IPIP 20-item inventory for FFM personality (Donnellan, Oswald,

Baird, & Lucas, 2006), using a 5-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (*Very Inaccurate*) and 5 (*Very Accurate*).

This particular measure of FFM was selected on the practical basis of both its accessibility and brevity in comparison to the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992b), in addition to its respectable levels of convergent, divergent, and criterion-related validity with comparable FFM measures (Baldasaro, Shanahan, & Bauer, 2013; Cooper, Smillie, & Corr, 2010; Donnellan et al., 2006). Indeed, the internal consistencies of the conscientiousness (α = .66), agreeableness (α = .69), and neuroticism (α = .69) measures found in the current study were satisfactory compared to Donnellan *et al's* (2006) respective coefficients of α = .69, .70, and .68, and Baldasaro *et al's* (2013) findings of α = .65, .70, and .62.

Represented by items 5 to 9 (Factor Loading 2) in Table 4, **Self-Regulatory Control** consisted of five items reflecting the suppression of emotion and impulsion to interact with social media without prior thought. Responses to the measure's items were reversed in the corresponding analysis so that higher mean scores indicated greater self-regulatory control. Items within this factor demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (α = .77). Significant associations illustrated in Table 5 between scores on the measure and both impulsiveness (r = -.43, $p < .001$) and conscientiousness (r = .25, $p < .001$), and to a lesser extent, agreeableness (r = .20, $p < .01$), self-monitoring (r = .14, $p < .05$), and neuroticism (r = -.12, $p < .05$), indicate the complexity of a construct that nevertheless appears to primarily reflect elements of impulse control.

Represented by items 10 to 14 (Factor Loading 3) in Table 4, **Prevention of Threats to Reputation** comprised of five items measuring the extent to which individuals prevent the expression of interactions that could lead others to form negative professional judgments of either themselves or others. Items within the factor demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (α = .76). Significant relationships between scores on the measure and impulsiveness (r =

-.16, $p < .01$), agreeableness (r = .18, $p < .01$), and neuroticism (r = .15, $p < .01$), appear to indicate an element of deliberation over ways in which to be judged favourably by others through one's online actions.

Represented by items 15 to 18 (Factor Loading 4) in Table 4, **Professional Self-Promotion** consisted of four items measuring the extent to which people strategically use social media to project idealised characteristics likely to be judged as desirable by a professional audience. Items within this factor demonstrated the lower end of satisfactory internal consistency (α = .69). As indicated in Table 5, a small but significant relationship was found between scores on the measure and neuroticism (r = .14, $p < .05$), suggesting that this facet of digital reputation management behaviour may be associated with public self-consciousness.

The categorical IV of **stage of study** was measure in relation to four levels: Sixth Form College students, and first, middle, and final-year undergraduate students. In doing so, the four stages of study enabled a continuum of proximity to organisation entry to be conceptualised, ranging from those relatively distant (i.e. college students intending on further study) to those relatively proximal to it (i.e. final year undergraduates). Postgraduate study is not included as a stage in this variable, given the variety of types and lengths of course that are on offer throughout UK universities, and therefore the number of extraneous variables that would be introduced.

6.2.4 Dependent Variables

The main DV measured in the current study was **Consideration of Professional Consequences**. Represented by items 1 to 4 (Factor Loading 1) in Table 4, the construct consisted of four items measuring the extent to which people consider the future professional judgments and career-related consequences resulting from their use of social media. Items within this variable demonstrated particularly good internal consistency (α = .87). Nevertheless, with this DV focusing on the consideration of professional consequences *prior* to posting, two

further DVs measured the extent to which young adults were addressing *existing* content and connections with others on Facebook and Twitter.

Influenced by the findings discussed by Madden *et al* (2013), Wang *et al* (2011), and Sleeper *et al* (2013), four **profile modification strategies** were measured in relation to both Facebook and Twitter: removing content posted by [1] self or [2] someone else, [3] restricting access of someone else to content, and [4] blocking or completely removing someone else from the network. Specifically, participants were asked "*Have you ever _____ on the basis that it could have harmed your career prospects in some way?***",** with each of the four outlined strategies presented in turn (see Appendix C, Q19 – 22). Respondents indicated either "No" (0) or "Yes" (1) to each question, producing aggregated totals ranging from 0 (i.e. all No's) to 4 (i.e. all Yes') for both Facebook and Twitter. Both scales demonstrating satisfactory internal consistencies of $\alpha = .77$ and $\alpha = .70$, respectively.

6.2.5 Procedure

Appendix C shows the full structure of the survey used in the present study, which was administered using the Qualtrics (2012) online survey platform. Prior to launching the survey in April 2013, a pilot phase was conducted with 23 respondents based within the researcher's professional network of PhD and academic colleagues, and recruited via social media. Feedback collected from these respondents identified a small number of minor issues relating to the wording of some items, which were subsequently addressed prior to launching the full survey. Regardless of the sampling strategy used, participants accessed the online survey via the same URL link, which enabled them to retain their anonymity. The procedure typically lasted for between 10 to 20 minutes for most respondents (177, 68%) and the basic structure of the survey was the same for each respondent, with slight deviations depending on prior responses.

The first section of the survey posed questions about demographic details, current stage of study, and career intentions. The second section consisted of the personality measures. In the third section, participants were

asked to provide information on various aspects of their social media use. The following section presented the 25 items previously described in Section 6.2.2. The presentation of these items was randomised for each respondent so to minimise any order effects that might occur in responding to a relatively large pool of items. At the close of this section, respondents were prompted to indicate with the four strategies of profile modification described in Section 6.2.4. Finally, participants were presented with the opportunity to enter a free prize draw and provided with a short debrief of the core aims and objectives of the study.

6.3 FINDINGS

6.3.1 Network Characteristics

Almost all participants reported being registered as a user of Facebook (252, 98.1%), whilst most were also registered on Twitter (200, 77.8%). In total, 195 participants (75.9%) reported being registered as a user of both sites. With regards to level of experience in using social media, 176 Facebook users (70.4%) reported having used the site for between 4 to 6 years, whereas a similar proportion of Twitter users had been registered for a lesser period of 1 to 3 years (142, 71%). Similarly, the median response for length of time spent using Facebook per day was between 30 and 60 minutes (54, 21%), though shorter on Twitter where it was reported as between 15 and 30 minutes (34, 17%).

In terms of network sizes, the median number of Facebook friends was 490 (n = 243, $\bar{x}$ = 534.5, Range = 10 – 1821, *SD* = 345.8) whilst the median size of Twitter followership was far smaller at 93 (n = 193, $\bar{x}$ = 161.6, Range = 0 - 2580, *SD* = 295.5), although the respective standard deviations in both cases indicated significant variance in responses. Both findings were broadly in-line with figures reported in comparable studies of young adults using social media, with a median of 79 followers reported for Twitter (Madden et al., 2013) and more than one-quarter of 18 to 29-year-olds in one survey reporting more than 500 Facebook friends (Smith, 2014).

Table 5. Zero-order Correlations between Scores for the Main Variables of Interest, with Means and Standard Deviations (n = 246)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	$\bar{x}$	SD
1. Self-Monitoring	1									4.36	.55
2. Impulsiveness	-.337***	1								2.09	.47
3. Agreeableness	.253***	-.201**	1							3.95	.71
4. Conscientiousness	.212***	-.524***	.078	1						3.40	.81
5. Neuroticism	-.082	.000	.051	-.052	1					3.01	.85
6. Self-Regulatory Control	.139*	-.434***	.200**	.251***	-.123*	1				3.91	.78
7. Prevention of Threats to Reputation	.076	-.158**	.183**	.081	.149**	.276***	1			3.04	.86
8. Professional Self-Promotion	.085	-.071	-.072	.017	.139*	-.116*	.400***	1		2.22	.76
9. Consideration of Professional Consequences	.051	-.159**	.070	.112*	.038	.247**	.543***	.373***	1	2.68	1.09

**** p < .001 level (one-tailed); ** p < .01 level (one-tailed); * p < .05 level (one-tailed)*

With regards to the use of privacy settings by users of Facebook, the findings reflected those of Madden (2012) and Madden and Smith (2010), with 90% reporting restricting their profiles to only to their confirmed network, and the remaining 10% (26) leaving their Facebook profiles open to the public. Conversely, 80% of Twitter users (158) reported enabling their Tweets to be visible to the public, with only 20% restricting access to confirmed followers; a finding that was roughly aligned with that of Krishnamurthy and Wills (2008) and Madden et al. (2013), who found that most users opted not to restrict access to their Twitter profiles.

Almost one-quarter (61, 23.7%) of the young adults surveyed indicated being registered with LinkedIn, and of those who were, only 3% (2) were college students, whilst 61% (37) were undergraduates, with around two-fifths (16, 42.1%) in the middle of their undergraduate studies and just over a quarter (10, 26.3%) in their first and final years, respectively. A basic content analysis of the responses provided by 182 of the 196 non-members of LinkedIn indicated that the most common reasons for not using the platform were that they had never heard of it (98, 54%), had no professional need to use it at the current time (40, 22%), or couldn't see the point of doing so (14, 8%).

6.3.2 Personality and Self-Regulation of Social Media Use

As illustrated in Table 5, the young adults surveyed typically reported considering the professional consequences of their interactions with social media on a relatively infrequent basis ($\bar{x}$ = 2.68, SD = 1.09), with around one-third (73, 32.3%) reporting either never or rarely doing so, compared to only one-tenth (41, 10.9%) often or always behaving this way. Students also reported relatively infrequently using social media to self-promote a professional image ($\bar{x}$ = 2.22, SD = .76), with almost half (128, 49.8%) reporting having never or rarely done so, and just 1.6% (7) often or always using the technology in this way. In contrast, participants reported relatively frequent self-regulatory control over their interactions with social media ($\bar{x}$ = 3.91, SD = .78), with almost half (144, 47.5%) indicating often or always doing so, and only 3.5% (6) never or

rarely regulating their behaviour. Students reported engaging in interactions that prevented threats to reputation on a moderately frequent basis ($\bar{x}$ = 3.04, SD = .86), with just over two-fifths reportedly doing so either sometimes or often (133, 41.7%).

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to address whether individual differences in personality and the self-regulation of social media use influenced the extent to which young adults reported considering the professional consequences of their actions (**RQ$_{3a}$** and **RQ$_{3b}$**). Based on the rationale outlined previously in Section 6.1, the five personality variables were block entered as the first step of the analysis, followed by the three variables representing self-regulation of social media use. Specifically, the personality variables were entered as the first step because existing literatures pointed towards a relationship with the expression of professionally risky behaviour on social media (see Chapter 2, Section 2.5), whilst the purpose of the second step was to examine whether the self-regulation variables could explain any further variance in the model when controlling for any effects of personality. The overall sample size of 257 participants exceeded the minimum thresholds proposed for testing multivariate models and the individual predictors within them (Green, 1991), and achieved satisfactory power in accordance with Cohen's (1988) recommendations.

A number of assumptions were evaluated prior to running the multiple regression analysis. First, visual inspection of response distributions and the Shapiro-Wilks statistic were used to check for significant indicators of non-normality, with a small number of outliers subsequently removed. Distributions of responses on some variables were skewed, though Z-score distributions indicated that these did not exceed more than two standard deviations and, therefore, were not transformed. Residuals were checked for normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity, with VIF and Tolerance statistics and collinearity and casewise diagnostics found to be within acceptable limits (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Independence of the residuals was also confirmed

by the Durbin-Watson (1951) value produced. All variables demonstrated acceptable coefficient alpha reliabilities ranging from .66 to .86 (Cronbach, 1951), thus satisfying Osborne and Waters' (2002) emphasis on using reliable measures in multivariate analysis.

Table 6. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of the Consideration of Professional Consequences on Social Media (n = 257)

	Block 1		Block 2	
	β	*t*	β	*t*
Self-Monitoring	.05	.77	-.01	-.16
Impulsivity	-.11	-1.44	.00	.04
Agreeableness	.10	.03	-.02	-.33
Conscientiousness	.10	.06	.04	.65
Neuroticism	.08	.04	-.03	-.62
Self-Regulatory Control			.15	2.45*
Prevention of Threats to Reputation			.41	6.65***
Professional Self-Promotion			.22	3.71***

R^2 = .033 for Block 1, **Δ** R^2 = .309 for Block 2 (p < .001)

.05 level (one-tailed), **.01 level (one-tailed), *..001 level (one-tailed)*

With respect to the first hypotheses, **H1a** and **H1b**, the zero-order correlations presented in Table 5 illustrate how only impulsiveness (r = -.16, p < .01) and conscientiousness (r = .11, p < .05) were significantly related to the consideration of professional consequences on social media in the directions predicted. Additionally, the multiple regression model presented in Table 6 indicates how, in accounting for the covariance of self-monitoring, agreeableness, and neuroticism, impulsiveness and conscientiousness were no longer significant predictors of variance in the DV. The non-significant R^2 = .033 value for this step of the model therefore underlined the lack of support for **H1a** and **H1b**, as none of the personality variables predicted variance in the consideration of professional consequences.

In contrast, Table 5 illustrates how self-regulatory control (r = .25, p < .01), prevention of threats to reputation (r = .54, p < .001) and professional self-promotion (r = .37, p < .001) were all significantly related to consideration of

professional consequences on social media in the directions predicted by the second hypothesis (**H2**). Additionally, when these variables were entered into in Block 2 of the multiple regression model presented in Table 6, prevention of threats to reputation (β = .41, $p < .001$) and Professional Self-Promotion (β = .22, $p < .001$) appeared to be particularly notable predictors of variance in the DV, with self-regulatory control also demonstrating significance (β = .15, $p < .05$). Following this step, the overall model was found to be significant, $F(8, 256) = 16.6$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .33$, with the three variables collectively accounted for 30.9% of overall variance in the extent to which young adults reported considering professional consequences when using social media. Thus, **H2** was supported.

6.3.3 Proximity to Organisational Entry

The following analyses addressed whether temporal proximity to organisational entry influenced the extent to which young adults considered their professional reputation on social media (**RQ_{3c}**), both in terms of construing the professional consequences of their actions (**H3a**) and utilising strategies of profile modification (**H3b**). To address this research question, a sub-sample of 212 full-time Sixth Form College (85, 40.1%) and undergraduate students was used (127, 59.9%). Undergraduate students were broken down into the three levels described in Section 6.2.3: first-year (58, 27.6%), middle-year(s) (41, 19.5%), and final-year students (28, 12.9%). The sub-sample included 78 (36.8%) males and 131 (61.8%) females, with an overall mean age of 19.02 years (SD = 2.23 years, range = 16 to 31 years). Comparing the network characteristics with those outlined in section 6.3.1 for the full sample revealed no noteworthy differences in the reported use of Facebook and Twitter.

An analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to examine the influence of proximity to organisational entry on the consideration of professional consequences when using social media. An ANCOVA design was chosen specifically because of the statistically significant relationships found in the model tested through the preceding multiple regression analysis, and subsequently each of these independent variables were controlled for as

covariates in examining the effect of proximity to organisational entry on the consideration of professional consequences.

As with the preceding multiple regression analysis, a number of assumptions were checked prior to running the ANCOVA. Visual inspection of response distributions and the Shapiro-Wilks statistic indicated that a small number of personality covariates were negatively skewed, though Z-score distributions indicated that these did not exceed more than three standard deviations. Additionally, Levene's equality of variance tests were found to be found to be non-significant for all but one of the variables, though analyses of variance are typically considered to be robust against violations of the assumption of normality as long as they are not too severe (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Indeed, Levene's test was non-significant when applied to the overall ANCOVA model, $F(3, 208) = .255$, $p = .86$.

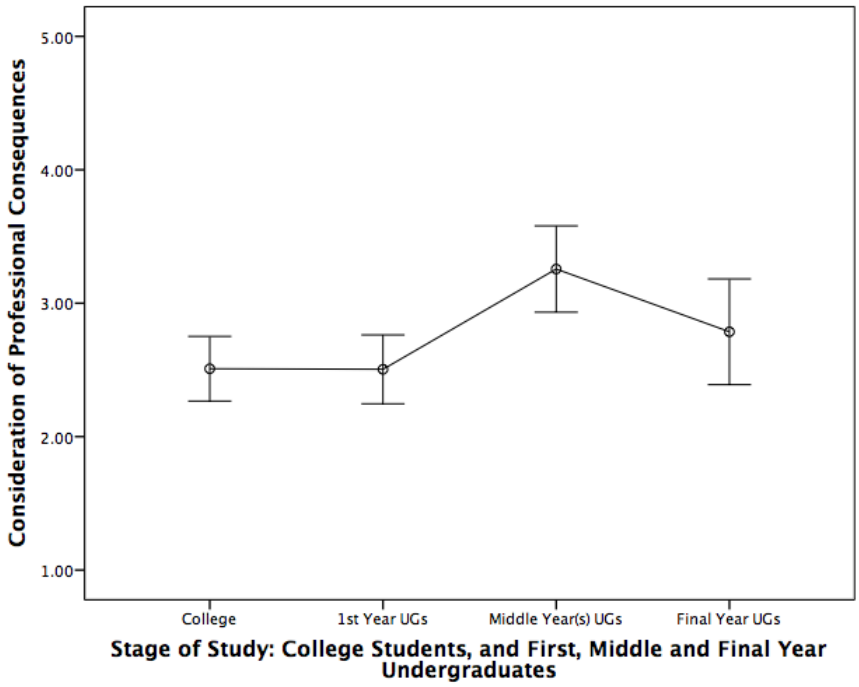


Figure 6. Box-plot Graph (with 95% Confidence Intervals) of Mean Scores for Consideration of Professional Consequences across Stages of Study

Reflecting the preceding analysis presented in Section 6.3.2, no significant main effects were found for the five personality covariates, though were for the

covariates of self-regulatory control, $F(1, 200) = 5.84$, $p < .05$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .03$, prevention of threats to reputation, $F(1, 200) = 32.59$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .14$, and professional self-promotion, $F(1, 200) = 12.05$, $p < .001$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .06$. In controlling for these effects, there was also a significant main effect of stage of study on the consideration of professional consequences, $F(3, 200) = 4.32$, $p < .01$, *partial* $\eta^2 = .06$. Subsequently, the overall model was significant, $F(11, 200) = 11.01$, $p < .001$, with the *partial* $\eta^2 = .38$ representing a relatively large effect size.

As illustrated in Figure 6, consideration of professional consequences was relatively infrequent across the whole sample of students ($\bar{x} = 2.69$, SD = 1.09), though post-hoc paired comparison analysis indicated that significantly more frequent consideration of professional consequences was reported by undergraduates in the middle of their studies compared to their first-year counterparts ($\bar{x} = 3.14$ vs. $\bar{x} = 2.49$, $p < .01$), and Sixth Form College students ($\bar{x} = 2.61$, $p < .05$). In contrast, no significant difference was found between middle and final-year undergraduates ($\bar{x} = 2.69$, $p = .26$, n.s.), or indeed between final-years and any of the other groups of students. Therefore, while stage of study did have a significant main effect on the extent to which students considered professional consequences, it was not in the way predicted by **H3a.**

With regards to the use of profile modification strategies**,** students typically reported having used less than half of the four strategies outlined on Facebook ($\bar{x} = 1.60$, SD = 1.56), and less than one-quarter on Twitter ($\bar{x} = .92$, SD = 1.35). Overall, students appeared to focus more on removing content than restricting or removing others from their networks. Specifically, around two-fifths reported having modified their own posts (55, 38%) and those shared by others (63, 43%) on Facebook, while 28% (41) had restricted access and 21% (31) had completely removed or blocked friends within their network. Similarly, on Twitter around one-quarter reported having modified their own posts (35, 24%) and 15% (22) for those shared by others, whilst only around one-tenth had restricted access (15, 10%) or removed or blocked another user completely (16, 11%).

Although it was intended that multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) would be used to examine the influence of proximity to organisational entry on the use of profile modification strategies (**H3b**), the particularly low responses outlined in relation to Twitter appeared to reflect a floor effect that made this analysis inappropriate. Specifically, the Shapiro-Wilks test indicated significantly non-normal distributions for profile modification strategies reported across the stages of study though were particularly pronounced for Twitter where distributions were considerably skewed (z = .7.56) and kurtotic (7.13). Furthermore, whilst Levene's test returned a non-significant result for Facebook profile modification strategies, $F(3, 142) = .76$, $p = .52$, it was significant for Twitter profile modification strategies, $F(3, 142) = 3.95$, $p < .05$, indicating a violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance across the stages of study.

A key issue appeared to be that because of the opportunistic sample and survey-based design of the study, the distribution of respondents across the different stages of study groups was particularly unequal, ranging from 62 college students to 15 final-year undergraduates. This can be potentially problematic in terms of creating Type I and II errors, although depending on the respective variances of the smallest and largest groups, effects can be attenuated if there is homogeneity of variance within groups (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Indeed, for profile management strategies on Facebook, non-normal distributions were less pronounced and homogeneity of variance assumed, whereas for Twitter, both were considerably more problematic, as outlined previously.

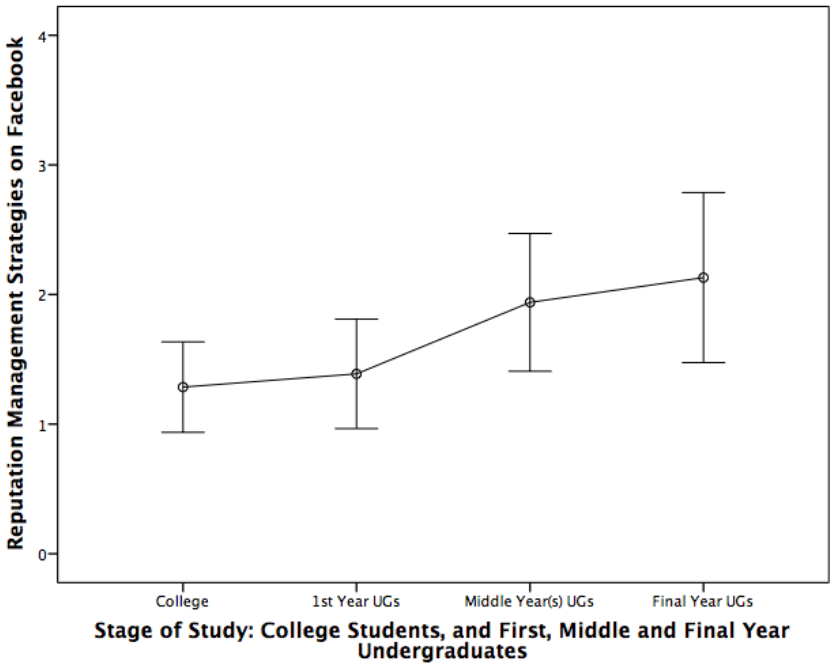


Figure 7. Box-plot Graph (with 95% Confidence Intervals) Showing Number of Profile Modification Strategies on Facebook Reported Across Stages of Study

On this basis, instead of conducting a MANOVA, a univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the hypothesis (**H3b**) that final-year undergraduates would indicate having used a greater number of profile modification strategies on Facebook than students at earlier stages of study. The ANOVA revealed a small but significant effect of stage of study on profile modification strategies used on Facebook, $F(3, 142) = 3.18$, $p < .05$. Based on the homogeneity of variance found across the grouping variable, Hochberg's GT2 post hoc analysis was conducted on the mean number of strategies reported for each stage of study. Although no statistically significant differences were found at the $p < .05$ threshold, the difference between Sixth Form College students and final-year undergraduates ($\bar{x} = 1.31$ vs. 2.40, $p = .08$, *n.s.*) did approach significance. As illustrated by Figure 7, responses therefore appeared to reflect the direction predicted by **H3b**, and as such, the hypothesis received tentative support in terms of strategies used on Facebook.

6.4 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study raise a number of important points with respect to the principal research question of why young adults approaching the college-to-work transition engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media, despite being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. Indeed, the students surveyed did appear to be aware of the need to self-regulate their interactions with social media, reporting relatively frequent avoidance of the use of profanity, sharing emotional outbursts, or posting without prior thought. Additionally, most students reported using the privacy controls on Facebook to limit access to just their friends, with only one in ten allowing their profile to be accessed by the public, and over two-fifths indicated having modified content on their profile to avoid harming their career prospects.

In contrast, however, the young adults also indicated considering the professional consequences of their interactions with social media on only a relatively infrequent basis. Additionally, the use of social media to promote a professional image was reported as being even less frequent; a finding that was supported further by only one-quarter of the students reporting being registered with LinkedIn. Additionally, students typically reported using profile modification strategies on only a limited basis, and particularly on Twitter where few indicated having modified existing content or connections in relation to their potential professional consequences. This finding appears to be in line with similar reports, where around only one-quarter of young adults have reported concern that their use of social media could harm future career prospects (e.g. OnDevice, 2013).

In combination, these findings appear to indicate that students were broadly aware of the need to self-regulate their interactions with social media and the level of online access permitted to others, but tended not to think specifically about the professional consequences of their actions, whether in terms of their potentially beneficial or damaging impact upon career prospects. To address why this might be, three research questions were posed at the outset

of the current chapter. The first, **RQ_{3a}**, focused on whether individual differences in personality influenced the extent to which young adults considered the professional consequences of their interactions with social media. Specifically, it was hypothesised that higher levels of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and self-monitoring (**H1a**), and lower levels of neuroticism and impulsiveness (**H1b**) would predict more frequent consideration of professional consequences.

Whilst zero-order correlations indicated support for the predicted relationships involving impulsiveness and conscientiousness, effect sizes were only small and became non-significant when the remaining personality covariates were entered into the first step of the hierarchical multiple regression model. Subsequently, neither hypothesis **H1a** or **H1b** were supported, indicating that individual differences in these forms of personality do not appear to be important factors in influencing the extent to which students consider the professional consequences of their actions when using social media. In contrast, the second hypothesis (**H2**) associated with **RQ_{3b}** was supported, with the analysis indicating that when entered in as the second step of the model, individual differences in self-regulatory control, professional self-promotion, and prevention of threats to reputation on social media each uniquely predicted variance in the extent to which students considered the professional consequences of their actions.

Given that the findings of Studies 1 and 2 suggested a possible influence of individual differences in cautiousness, impulse control, and sensitivity towards social contexts on expressing "professionally appropriate" online behaviour, the lack of support for the first hypothesis was unexpected. One possible explanation is that individual differences in personality simply do not have a notable effect on the construal of professional consequences online. This seems unlikely, however, given that a number of studies have found associations between aspects of personality and various forms of risk-related interactions with social media, including likelihood of sharing personally-identifying information (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; C. Ross et al., 2009),

cautiousness in online self-disclosures (Seidman, 2013), and the posting of professionally inappropriate content (Karl et al., 2010; Moore & McElroy, 2012).

Alternatively, measuring the consideration of professional consequences on social media through a self-report measure may have had an effect on failing to find support for **H1a** and **H1b**. Indeed, as outlined previously in Section 6.1, a number of studies have found mixed evidence for significant relationships between personality and self-report measures of interaction with social media (e.g. Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; C. Ross et al., 2009; Seidman, 2013), suggesting focusing instead on evidence of actual behaviour through methods of online observation or data mining. However, the significant relationships between various aspects of personality and both the variables of self-regulatory control and prevention of threats to reputation on social media suggest that individual differences in personality may yet exert an influence on the consideration of professional risk online, albeit indirectly through measures of self-regulating social media use.

The third, and final, research question (**RQ_{3c}**) shifted focus to whether temporal proximity to organisational entry influenced the extent to which students considered the professional consequences of their actions and used profile modification strategies on Facebook and Twitter. Specifically, the first part of the third hypothesis (**H3a**) proposed that, controlling for any effects of individual differences in personality and the self-regulation of social media use, final-year undergraduates would report more frequent consideration of professional consequences than students at earlier stages of study. The findings indeed indicated a significant main effect of stage of study, though post hoc analysis revealed that it was middle-year undergraduates who reported the most frequent consideration of professional consequences in comparison to those at earlier stages of study, whilst final-year undergraduate students reported levels closer to their first-year peers and Sixth Form College students.

Though it cannot be confirmed in the present study, the timing of the data collection may have played an important role in this finding. In particular, the

survey was administered towards the end of the final semester of the academic year; a time at which middle-year undergraduate students are typically preparing to enter their final year of study, and therefore starting to think about employment beyond graduation and possibly even attending careers service talks that focus on the relationship between social media and employability. Indeed, at the time of the study, the University of Nottingham, from which over two-thirds of the undergraduate sample was recruited, delivered a number of developmental courses for students approaching graduation that included advice on using social media. The finding may therefore have reflected elements of the transition in preparing for professional life beyond graduation.

Indeed, the findings in relation to the second part of the third hypothesis present indirect support for this interpretation. Specifically, it was predicted by **H3b** that final-year undergraduates would report having used a greater number of profile modification strategies on Facebook and Twitter than students at earlier stages of study. Although the analysis ultimately examined only those strategies reported in relation to Facebook due to floor effects found for the number of strategies used on Twitter, a significant main effect of stage of study was found. Furthermore, although it was not significant at the $p < .05$ threshold, post-hoc analysis revealed that the difference in mean number of strategies reported between Sixth Form College and final-year undergraduate students approached significance ($p = .08$) in the predicted direction.

With the point of data collection occurring shortly prior to graduation for members of the latter cohort, it is likely that many of the respondents would have already started to actively search and apply for jobs; and perhaps even have secured employment. In which case, the relatively infrequent consideration of professional consequences in combination with the greater use of profile modification strategies reported by members of this cohort point towards the possibility that final-year undergraduates had already taken action to address any professionally risky aspects of their social media presence earlier in the academic year. The peak and then subsequent drop across the final year of study

in the consideration of professional consequences on social media raises the intriguing possibility that rather than *actual* temporal proximity to organisational entry playing a role, the *psychological* distance of professional audience may be a more important factor.

Specifically, the findings of this study suggest that consideration of professional consequences may be relatively low for young adults yet to make the college-to-work transition because for the most part, the presence of a professional audience on social media is psychologically distant, not only in temporal terms but also socially due to the likely absence of professional connections within their online networks. However, in transitioning from the middle to final year of undergraduate study, students may start to think more actively about the behavioural expectations of a professional audience, particularly as many students report an awareness of prospective employers using social media profiles to vet applicants (e.g. Root & McKay, 2014).

One way in which this hypothesis can be interpreted theoretically is by drawing on the construal-level theory of psychological distance (CLT: Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2010). This perspective proposes that the more psychologically distant objects or events are from direct experience, the more abstract their construal will be, and similarly, events or objects construed in terms of specific, concrete details will be perceived as being psychologically closer. Although R. Miller et al. (2010, p. 381) have referred to CLT in their hypothesis that "*Given… abstract ideas about the future, students may not see their posting behaviour as particularly risky*", the potential relationship between psychological distance of professional audience and perceptions of professional risk has yet to be addressed empirically within the context of social media and its use by young adults. It is to this gap that the empirical study presented in following chapter turns to address.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS

A number of recent studies have presented findings that portray young adults as engaging in a range of professionally inappropriate behaviours on social media (Karl et al., 2010; Peluchette & Karl, 2007; Root & McKay, 2014; Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al., 2013; Y. Wang et al., 2011), failing to understand and use privacy controls effectively (Acquisti & Gross, 2006; Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Krishnamurthy & Wills, 2008), and being relatively unconcerned about the judgments of future audiences to their content (OnDevice, 2013; Tufekci, 2008). In contrast, the current study indicated that students were typically aware of the need to carefully self-regulate their interactions with social media, to use restrictive privacy settings on Facebook, and to modify potentially risky content. However, this appeared to reflect a more general approach to digital reputation management amongst students, rather than specific concern about the professional consequences of their online actions.

The key caveat to this, however, was that of all the young adults surveyed, it was those transitioning to the final year of their undergraduate courses and enter the phase of job seeking who indicated the most frequent consideration of professional consequences when using social media. With individual differences in personality seemingly not as important as suggested by the findings of Studies 1 and 2 and the limited literature examining risky behaviour on social media (e.g. Karl et al., 2010; Moore & McElroy, 2012), the influence of situation indicates a promising role for the construal-level theory of psychological distance (e.g. Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Specifically, it may provide the theoretical link between the perceived presence of professional audience and perception of professional risk on social media. The following chapter now outlines how Study 4 examined this relationship amongst job seeking final-year undergraduate students preparing for organisational entry.

7

STUDY 4: PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL AUDIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL RISK ON FACEBOOK

7.1 INTRODUCTION

A consistent theme throughout the findings of the preceding three empirical studies has been an emphasis upon the future, and in particular, seeking to control the professional consequences of online behaviour. In Study 1, this took the form of organisational concerns about the reputational risk associated with unrestricted use of social media by employees, with social media policies representing a subsequent means of control. In Study 2, employees described the key role of considering potential consequences for professional reputation in how they self-regulated content and managed personal and professional boundaries on social media. In Study 3, students typically conveyed a lack of concern for the professional consequences of their interactions with social media, whether beneficial or detrimental, though a crucial caveat was found in the form of those preparing to enter their final year of undergraduate study, where consideration appeared markedly higher.

One interpretation offered in relation to this finding was that because of the need for final-year undergraduate students to start searching and applying for either employment or further study opportunities following graduation, the professional consequences of their online actions become a more salient concern; particularly as many students appear to be aware that prospective employers monitor the social media profiles of applicants (e.g. Root & McKay, 2014; Vicknair et al., 2010). Though Study 3 was unable to either confirm or reject these interpretations, the hypothesis appears to be theoretically aligned

with the construal-level theory of psychological distance (CLT: Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2010).

According to Trope and Liberman (2010), the notion of construal refers to the observation that "*although we cannot experience what is not present, we can make predictions about the future, remember the past, imagine other people's reactions, and speculate about what might have been*." (p. 440). Indeed, a central tenet of CLT is that individuals mentally represent objects or events in terms of their psychological distance from directly experienced reality, and that this occurs in relation to a various psychological dimensions, including time, space, social relations, and hypotheticality (Liberman et al., 2007). Therefore, psychological distance can be conceived as the subjective experience of how close or far away something is from the self, which subsequently influences the level of detail with which it is construed.

As demonstrated in comprehensive literature reviews by Trope, Liberman, and Wakslak (2007) and Liberman et al. (2007), empirical findings have consistently indicated that as the psychological distance of an object or event increases, its level of construal becomes more abstract and less detailed, whilst psychologically closer objects or events become more concrete and focused on low-level details. This relationship has subsequently been shown to influence a range of predictions, evaluations, and actions across a variety of contexts. For instance, as the temporal distance of an action increases, it has been found that perceptions of its advantages become more salient than its disadvantages (Liberman & Trope, 2008), and decisions become influenced more by the perceived desirability of the associated end-state compared to its feasibility (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Similarly, the behaviour of others tends to be judged more in terms of decontextualised, abstract dispositions, such as personality traits, when they are psychologically distant in a social sense (Trope & Liberman, 2003).

One particularly relevant application of CLT and psychological distance with regards to this thesis has been through the examination of its relationship

with risk perception, and subsequent risk prevention behaviours. For instance, Fischhoff, Gonzalez, Small, and Lerner (2003) found that perceptions of closer geographical proximity to the World Trade Center in New York were significantly associated with judgments of the increased risk of being involved in future terrorist attacks. Additionally, Chandran and Menon (2004) found that the framing of health risks associated with mononucleosis as either occurring "every day" or "every year" influenced risk perceptions, with participants in the former, proximal condition found to not only perceive the level of risk as being significantly higher than those in the latter, distal condition, but also reported greater concerns about the risk and increased intentions to engage in precautionary behaviour.

Echoing these findings, Carvalho, Block, Sivaramakrishnan, Manchanda, and Mitakakis (2008) found that perceptions of risk associated with a food-borne contamination were higher if the threat was framed as originating from a culturally similar country to the participant, in addition to being associated with increased intentions of engaging in preventative behaviours. Similarly, Spence et al. (2012) indicated that concerns and preparedness to take action in relation to climate change were greater when participants perceived the risk associated with it as being psychologically closer. Nevertheless, the extension of CLT and psychological distance to understanding risky behaviour on social media has been extremely limited to date. Indeed, R. Miller et al. (2010) discuss the potential role of the framework, though acknowledge that "*lacking further research, its purported effects are purely speculative*" (p. 381).

The main focus of the study outlined in this chapter was therefore upon examining the potential relationship between psychological distance of professional audience and perceptions of professionally risky behaviour on Facebook. Whilst the previous empirical studies in this thesis investigated professional risky behaviour in relation to various social media platforms, the current study focused specifically on Facebook. The core rationale for this was that Facebook presents the greatest potential professional risk for young adults

approaching the college-to-work transition given that profiles typically convey the authentic names and personalities of users (e.g. Back et al., 2010; boyd, 2012; Hogan, 2012; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Wilson et al., 2012), yet privacy controls are often poorly understood (Debatin et al., 2009).

Prior to examining the role of psychological distance, however, the finding that undergraduate students entering their final year in Study 3 expressed greater concern for their professional consequences also suggests that intentions to applying for jobs may play a role in influencing perceptions of professional risk. Indeed, R. Miller et al. (2012) found that students who self-identified as being "on the market" and searching for jobs reported greater concern for professional image when using social media. However, the effect size reported was only small, possibly due to the limitations of using a dichotomous measure of job searching. Thus using a more nuanced measure, the first research question of the current study was,

RQ$_{4a}$: *Do intentions to start actively applying for jobs influence how young adults in their final year of undergraduate study perceive professional risk on Facebook?*

Drawing on the aforementioned studies of CLT and Miller et al's (2012) findings, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: *More immediate intentions to start actively applying for jobs will predict greater ratings of perceived risk in relation to professionally risky Facebook posts.*

For the second research question, the specific form of psychological distance examined related to employer surveillance on Facebook. Despite its status as a recent phenomenon, just under half of the 289 university students surveyed by Vicknair et al. (2010) reported an awareness that recruiters would monitor the social media profiles of applicants, while Root and McKay (2014) indicated that four-fifths of the 433 undergraduate students surveyed rated employers as being either likely or very likely to look at Facebook. As indicated by Peluchette and Karl (2009), this awareness appears to have an effect on how

students subsequently use social media, with those reporting being satisfied with employers seeing their Facebook profile significantly less likely to post inappropriate profile content. To examine whether the psychological distance of professional audience may play a role in this, the second research question of the present study was:

RQ$_{4b}$: *Does the psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook influence how young adults in their final year of undergraduate study perceive professional risk on the site?*

As outlined previously, a number of studies have presented empirical evidence indicating that when a risky or hazardous event is construed as occurring sooner in time, closer in physical distance, occurring to people similar to oneself, or happening with greater certainty, perceptions of risk are reported as being greater than when it is construed as being more psychologically distant. On this basis, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: *Lower psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook will predict greater ratings of perceived risk in relation to professionally risky posts on the site.*

However, a key feature of Facebook is that its privacy controls enable users to limit access to their profile with respect to unwanted audiences, of whom one may include prospective employers. Therefore, the level of trust that Facebook users place in the ability of their privacy settings to block access to such audiences may have an influence on the perceived likelihood of employers monitoring their profile. To address this possibility, the third research question of the study was:

RQ$_{4c}$: *Does level of trust in Facebook privacy settings influence how young adults in their final year of undergraduate study perceive the psychological distance of employers looking at their profile?*

Specifically, the following final hypothesis was proposed:

H3: *Greater trust in Facebook privacy settings will be positively associated with higher psychological distance of employer surveillance on the site.*

7.2 DESIGN

The present study used an online, cross-sectional survey method to collect data from UK-based undergraduate students within their final year of study and intending on searching for jobs. The three hypotheses were tested with independent variables (IVs) measuring intention to start applying for jobs (**H1**), psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook (**H2**), and trust in Facebook privacy settings (**H3**). The dependent variable (DV) was rating of professional risk, generated from responses to twenty short vignettes representing different facets of professionally risky behaviour on Facebook. The full details of this study design are now outlined in the following sections.

7.2.1 Participants

The overall sample consisted of 257 full-time undergraduate students[3] who self-reported using Facebook on a daily basis. With regards to gender, the survey included 83 males (33.9%) and 157 (64.1%) females. The median age of the students surveyed was 21-years-old (SD = 1.88 years), and ranged from 19 to 25 years. To control for "actual" distance to graduation, when the study was launched in December 2013 respondents were informed that they were only eligible to participate if they were due to graduate and start looking for work within the current academic year. An opportunistic sampling approach was adopted in the current study, with participants recruited through a range of strategies including the distribution of posters and flyers on the University of Nottingham campuses, emails to University departments, and face-to-face recruitment at lectures within the University.

Recruitment was also extended online via a range of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and The Student Room online forum. The

[3] 464 respondents started the survey but 207 failed to complete it, leading to a completion rate of 55.4%.

Twitter profiles and Facebook Pages of university careers services based across over 100 UK-based HEIs were also contacted and provided with a brief description of the study and URL for students to follow. As recruitment was specifically targeting Facebook users within their final year of study, the platform's "Ad Campaign" tool was used to place a small advertisement in the Facebook newsfeeds of over 25,000 final year students based across the UK. Indeed, two-fifths (106, 41%) of the participants reported finding out about the survey through social media. All respondents were presented with the opportunity to enter a free, random prize draw for one of ten £25 Amazon.co.uk gift vouchers, which was made once the survey had closed.

Almost half of the sample (116, 47.5%) were final-year students based at the University of Nottingham, although responses were also collected from a further 61 UK-based universities, with each contributing a mean number of 1.74 responses. Participants indicated that they would primarily be graduating from subjects in the Sciences (81, 33.3%), Social Sciences (69, 28.4%) and Arts faculties (48, 19.8%). Least represented were students based in Engineering (13, 5.3%) and Medicine and Health Sciences (16, 6.6%). Intended job sector destinations were also broadly distributed, including Health and Social Care (31, 13%), Teaching and Education (29, 12%), Accountancy, Banking and Finance (20, 8%), IT and Information Services (18, 7%) and the Public Sector (15, 6%). The following sections now outline the scales developed for measuring psychological distance and professionally risky behaviour on Facebook in this study.

7.2.2 Scale Development I: Psychological Distance

Much of the existing research on construal level theory (CLT: Liberman & Trope, 1998) and psychological distance has drawn upon an experimental paradigm to demonstrate how priming either the proximal or distal psychological distance of an object or event influences the level at which it is construed (e.g. Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope et al., 2007). In contrast, far fewer studies have measured psychological distance using the survey method, even

though measuring baseline levels of psychological distance towards a particular event or object can reveal important information about perceptions of risks such as terrorism, health disease, or even reputational damage on social media. As one of the few studies to have used such an approach, Spence et al. (2012) designed a reliable scale-based measure of psychological distance to examine perceptions of climate change, finding relatively large effect sizes in its prediction of concern and subsequent preparedness to reduce energy usage.

Subsequently, Spence *et al's* (2012) scale was a key influence in developing items to measure psychological distance of employer surveillance in this study. As illustrated in Appendix D (see Q6), nine items were created in the form of short statements and rated on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 7 (Strongly Agree). Covering three of the four psychological distance dimensions outlined by Liberman et al. (2007), four related to social distance, three to hypothetical distance, and two to temporal distance. An additional item adapted Spence *et al's* (2012) measure of temporal distance (*"When, if at all, do you think employers will be looking at your Facebook profile?")* and was rated on an alternative 7-point Likert scale, anchored at 1 (They have already started) and 7 (Never).

Principal components analysis (PCA) was conducted to examine whether the items representing temporal, social, and hypothetical dimensions of psychological distance would load appropriately onto three distinct components. Specifically, Liberman *et al* (2007) note that the dimensions of psychological distance should all be positively related to each other given that they represent the same underlying construct. Response distributions were checked for all ten psychological distance variables and though a number of outliers were identified, only a small number fell outside of 3 standard deviations from the mean scores. In the four cases where this was evident, further inspection of the dataset revealed consistent patterns of extreme responses, suggesting that these participants were simply clicking through the survey. These outlier data points were subsequently removed from further analysis.

Table 7. Zero-order Correlations Between Psychological Distance Variables (n = 257)

	S1	S2	S3	S4	T1	T2	T3	H1	H2
Social1: Looking at profiles of people seeking a similar type of job (r)	1								
Social2: Looking at profiles of people using the site with similar regularity (r)	**.280***	1							
Social3: Looking at profiles of people with a significantly different size of friendship network	**-.128***	**-.201***	1						
Social4: Surveillance is most likely to happen to other people	.029	**-.142***	**.328***	1					
Temporal1: When employers will be looking at profile	**.194***	**.224***	-.028	.050	1				
Temporal2: Looking at profile only once very close to graduating	**-.213***	**-.257***	.059	**.124***	-.052	1			
Temporal3: Looking at profile in the very near future, if not already (r)	**.347***	**.204***	.050	**.184****	**.391***	**-.134***	1		
Hypothetical1: Almost certain employers will be looking at profile (r)	**.419***	**.194***	.033	**.215***	**.291***	-.093	**.574***	1	
Hypothetical2: Highly unlikely employers will be interested in looking at profile	**.254***	**.111***	**.224***	**.327***	**.289***	-.085	**.482***	**.522***	1
Hypothetical3: High probability that will know if employers have been looking at profile (r)	.055	.043	**-.245***	**-.233***	.040	-.079	-.010	**-.114***	-.079

****. Significant at 0.001 level (1-tailed); **. Significant at 0.01 level (1-tailed); *. Significant at 0.05 level (1-tailed)*

Table 7 illustrates the relationships between the 10 psychological distance variables included in the current study. A number of variables appeared to be problematic with respect to Liberman *et al* (2007)'s conceptualisation of psychological distance. Specifically, the relationships between both *Hypothetical3* and *Temporal2* and other psychological distance variables tended to be either non-significant or significantly negative, with the distribution of responses significantly skewed. Similarly, *Social3* and *Social4* also demonstrated either non-significant or weakly negative relationships with most other psychological distance variables, including *Social1* and *Social2*, and demonstrated relatively skewed distributions. On this basis, *Hypothetical3*, *Temporal2*, *Social3,* and *Social4* were removed from further analysis, leaving six psychological distance variables remaining.

With the number of extracted components set to three, PCA with a direct oblimin oblique rotation explained 75.24% of total variance, though the pattern and structure matrices produced did not follow the anticipated structure of loadings. Specifically, *Hypothetical1* and *Hypothetical2* formed one component along with *Temporal3*, leaving *Temporal1* to form a separate single-item component. Whilst *Social1* and *Social2* did form the remaining component, the rotation saw the *Social1* variable load similarly across all components, questioning the parsimony of the three-component solution. PCA was repeated without predefining the number of components to be extracted, and indicated support for a single component solution. However, the mean communality of .44 was low in comparison to Kaiser's (1960) proposed threshold of .60, and further inspection indicated that this may have been due to the low component (.42) and communality (.17) scores for *Social2*.

With *Social2* subsequently removed, PCA was run for a final time with a direct oblimin oblique rotation. This again extracted a single factor solution that accounted for 50.92% of total variance, and demonstrated an acceptable KMO statistic of .780, with Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = $p < .001$. The mean communality of .51 also demonstrated improvement, though remained below

Kaiser's (1960) aforementioned threshold of .60. Similarly, factor loadings were also improved from the previous iteration of PCA, ranging from .571 to .818, as illustrated in Table 8. The resulting 5-item composite measure of psychological distance is outlined in Section 7.2.4.

Table 8. Means, Standard Deviations, and Component Loadings for Psychological Distance Variables (n = 257)

Psychological Distance Variable	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	*Component Loading*
Hyp1: Almost certain employers will be looking at profile (r)	3.32	1.56	.818
Temp3: Looking at profile in the very near future, if not already (r)	3.56	1.61	.811
Hyp2: Highly unlikely employers will be interested in looking at profile	3.19	1.65	.734
Soc1: Looking at profiles of people seeking a similar type of job (r)	3.81	1.37	.596
Temp1: When employers will be looking at profile	4.47	1.84	.571

7.2.3 Scale Development II: Professionally Risky Behaviour on Facebook

Of the limited number of studies that have examined professionally risky behaviour on Facebook, most have used self-report measures of the construct. For instance, Karl et al. (2010) created a 10-item "Facebook Faux Pas" scale that asked students to rate the likelihood of posting risky content, and more recently, Root and McKay (2014) developed an 18-item scale measuring attitudes towards risky behaviours. Indeed, both studies cited the influence of four particular industry-based social recruiting surveys (see Table 9: CareerBuilder, 2012; Cross-Tab, 2010; Jobvite, 2014b; Reppler, 2011) in which five types of professionally risky behaviour appear to be consistently identified: the use of profanity, the use of derogatory language, references to drinking or drug taking, indication of poor communication skills such as spelling and use of grammar, and critical or negative comments about employers.

Table 9. Social Recruiting Surveys and Social Media Behaviours Identified as Professionally Risky by Employers

Survey Source	*Sample*	*Behaviours Identified as Professionally Risky*
Harris Interactive on behalf of CareerBuilder (2012)	2,303 US-based hiring managers and human resource professionals	• Provocative/inappropriate photos/info (49%) • Info about drinking/using drugs (45%) • Poor communication skills (35%) • Criticising ('bad mouthing') previous employer (33%) • Discriminatory comments: race, gender, religion, etc (28%)
Cross-Tab Market Research on behalf of Microsoft (2010)	1,200 recruiting professionals and 1,200 consumers in four developed nations (US, UK, Germany and France)	• Inappropriate comments/text written by the candidate (UK: 57%) • Unsuitable photos, videos and information (UK: 51%) • Concerns about the candidate's lifestyle (UK: 45%) • Poor communication skills exhibited (UK: 41%) • Criticism of previous employers, co-workers, or clients (UK: 40%) • Inappropriate comments written by other colleagues (UK: 37%) • Membership of certain groups and networks (UK: 33%)
Lab42 on behalf of Reppler (2011)	300 US-based professionals involved in the hiring process for their companies	• Posted inappropriate photos (11%) • Posted inappropriate comments (11%) • Posted negative comments about previous employer (11%) • Demonstrated poor communication skills (11%) • Posted content about using drugs (10%) • Made discriminatory comments (10%) • Posted content about drinking (9%) • Shared confidential information from a previous employer (7%)
Jobvite (2013, 2014b)	Over 1600 HR and Recruitment professionals from across the world	• References to doing illegal drugs (83% - same as in 2013) • Posts of a sexual nature (70% - down from 71% in 2013) • Profanity in posts (63% - down from 65% in 2013) • Spelling/grammar errors in posts (66% - up from 61% in 2013) • Photos of alcohol consumption (44% - down from 47% in 2013)

Rather than asking participants to self-report the likelihood of posting these risky forms of content (Karl et al., 2010) or rate their perceptions of the importance to prospective employers (Root & McKay, 2014), the current study developed short vignettes that represented each of the five aforementioned types of professional risk. Specifically, 20 'mock' Facebook posts were constructed that represented both text-based status updates (n = 16) and images (n = 4). The standardised format of the vignettes is depicted in Q7 of Appendix D. Where possible to do so, the content included in the vignettes were either adapted from real cases reported in the mainstream press, or from risky posts observed by the researcher within his personal social media networks. All user images included within the vignettes were obscured, pseudonyms randomly generated, and content sufficiently adapted so that the original post could not be found if a participant were to search online for it.

The specific sources for the content used in the final vignettes are outlined in Table 10. Extensive care was taken in designing the vignettes so that they would be likely to be perceived as risky from the perspective of a recruiter, but not extremely offensive to UK-based young adults aged around 21-years-old. To check this, a pool of 20 vignettes was piloted with 34 professional colleagues and peers of the researcher. As with the final version of the survey, respondents were asked to imagine that for each of the 20 posts, a similar post could be found upon their own Facebook Timeline. They were then prompted to rate how risky the post would be to limiting their job prospects, using a 7-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (Not At All Risky) and 7 (Extremely Risky). With a moderate level of risk indicated overall ($\bar{x}$ = 3.41, SD = .76), only one vignette was identified as being especially high risk (x^{-} = 5.12: Larson, 2012), although two independent researchers identified 3 further vignettes that were subsequently amended for the final versions used.

Table 10. Sources of the 20 Professionally Risky Facebook Post Vignettes

Professionally Risky Facebook Post	*Source of Stimuli*
Profanity1: "Little bit fucked" STATUS	Facebook Connection of Researcher
Profanity2: "Bitching" & "Bullshit" IMAGE	Facebook Connection of Researcher
Profanity3: "Douchebags" STATUS	Created by Researcher
Profanity4: "Shit" STATUS	Created by Researcher
Spelling1: "Weather you win" STATUS	Facebook Connection of Researcher
Spelling2: "Definately" STATUS	Created by Researcher
Spelling3: "Their" & "wot" STATUS	Created by Researcher
Spelling4: "omg" & "lol" STATUS	Created by Researcher
Derogatory1: "Religion" IMAGE	Facebook Connection of Researcher
Derogatory2: "Sexist" STATUS	Real Life Case: Toronto Firefighter (Nursall, 2013)
Derogatory3: "Weight" STATUS	Facebook Connection of Researcher
Derogatory4: "Class" STATUS	Real Life Case: Business Executive (Bennett-Smith, 2013)
Drink/drugs1: "Painfully drunk" STATUS	Real Life Case: Young Public Servant (Myers, 2013)
Drink/drugs2: "Guinness drink" IMAGE	Real Life Case: High School Teacher (Sullivan, 2011)
Drink/drugs3: "Marijuana/Meth" IMAGE	Created by Researcher
Drink/drugs4: "Drunk me nightmare" STATUS	Facebook Connection of Researcher
Criticism1: "Lecturers/waste of time" STATUS	Created by Researcher
Criticism2: "Weighing paycheck" STATUS	Real Life Case: Job Applicant (McGlaun, 2009)
Criticism3: "VC vs. Grad pay fairness" STATUS	Real Life Case: Bank Worker (Daily Mail Reporter, 2011)
Criticism4: "No tip" STATUS	Real Life Case: Food Services Worker (Tepper, 2013)

As indicated in Table 11, almost all inter-item correlations between the ratings of professional risk were significantly positive at a level of $p < .001$, providing an initial indication that all were measuring a similar underlying construct. To examine whether the five types of professional risk were represented as distinct factors, PCA was conducted on the final data set (n = 257) using a direct oblimin oblique rotation procedure set to extract five components. The five-component solution accounted for 44.38% of total

variance, although while the pattern and structure matrices indicated that some items loaded together onto components in the anticipated ways, many cross-loadings were noted and the structure therefore lacked clarity. Subsequently, parallel analysis (O'Connor, 2000) was conducted on the 20 variables and as indicated by the scree plot in Figure 8, the analysis confirmed the suitability of a two-component solution.

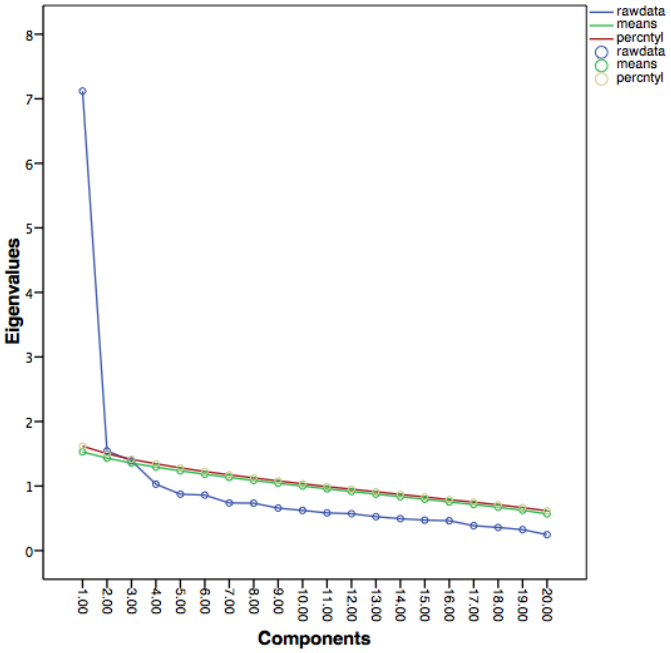


Figure 8. Parallel Analysis Scree Plot of Component Eigenvalues

A subsequent iteration of the PCA with extracted components set to 2 demonstrated a relatively simple two-factor structure. However, with reference to Comrey and Lee's (1992) proposed cross-loading cut-off thresholds of .5/.2 or .6/.3, problematic cross-loadings were noted for *Profanity4* (.477 and .427), *Derogatory2* (.452 and .602) and *Derogatory4* (.427 and .477). With these 3 variables removed from further analysis, a final iteration of PCA indicated a clear and parsimonious two-factor structure for the remaining 17 risky variables, with loadings on the pattern matrix illustrated in Table 12.

Table 11. Zero-order Correlations Between Ratings of Risk for Professionally Risky Facebook Post Vignettes (n = 257)

	P1	P2	P3	P4	S1	S2	S3	S4	DL1	DL2	DL3	DL4	D/D1	D/D2	D/D3	D/D4	C1	C2	C3
P1	1																		
P2	.504***	1																	
P3	.372***	.423***	1																
P4	.319***`	.350***	.384***	1															
S1	.200***	.229***	.187***	217***	1														
S2	.316***	.288***	.300***	287***	.397***	1													
S3	.241***	.311***	.332***	420***	.340***	.449***	1												
S4	.263***	.182**	.287***	.297***	.419***	.528***	.447***	1											
DL1	.330***	.380***	.400***	.321***	.138*	.239***	.309***	.155**	1										
DL2	.168**`	.146**	.281***	.374***	.287***	.266***	.362***	.334***	.324***	1									
DL3	.339***	.356***	.395***	.341***	.214***	.255***	.355***	.282***	.406***	.399***	1								
DL4	.251***	0.091	.316***	.197***	.138*	.188***	.324***	.245***	.356***	.451***	.444***	1							
D/D1	.350***	.377***	.478***	.321***	.192***	.355***	.332***	.230***	.433***	.357***	.379***	.279***	1						
D/D2	.419***	.325***	.361***	.283***	.185***	.310***	.219***	.275***	.253***	.150**	.196***	.170***	.452***	1					
D/D3	.322***	.374***	.305***	.362***	.175***	.263***	.351***	.187***	.343***	.378***	.322***	.351***	.460***	.279***	1				
D/D4	.414***	.386***	.415***	.368***	.171**	.346***	.376***	.251***	.418***	.347***	.319***	.249***	.698***	.413***	.481***	1			
C1	.349***	.313***	.490***	.341***	.172**	.330***	.290***	.268***	.459***	.273***	.416***	.338***	.420***	.304***	.341***	.502***	1		
C2	.231***	.300***	.333***	.338***	0.097	.242***	.352***	.162**	.338***	.287***	.351***	.362***	.343***	.226***	.341***	.365***	.384***	1	
C3	.365***`	.459***	.338***	.292***	.155**	.265***	.231***	.240***	.330***	.137*	.284***	.169**	.277***	.242***	.329***	.376***	.447***	.369***	1
C4	.226***	.280***	.392***	.300***	.206***	.269***	.366***	.218***	.359***	.314***	.365***	.321***	.330***	.238***	.338***	.349***	.523***	.363***	.379***

****. Significant at 0.001 level (1-tailed); **. Significant at 0.01 level (1-tailed); *. Significant at 0.05 level (1-tailed)*

Table 12. Means, Standard Deviations, and Pattern Matrix of the PCA: [1] Content-Based Professional Risk (1 - 13) and [2] Style-Based Professional Risk (14 - 17)

			Pattern Matrix Components	
Professionally Risky Stimuli	$\bar{x}$	*SD*	*1*	*2*
1. Profanity1: "Little bit fucked" STATUS	3.25	1.50	**.555**	.105
2. Profanity2: "Bitching" & "Bullshit" IMAGE	3.37	1.52	**.634**	.026
3. Profanity3: "Douchebags" STATUS	3.78	1.49	**.656**	.052
4. Derogatory1: "Religion" IMAGE	4.47	1.58	**.722**	-.130
5. Derogatory3: "Weight" STATUS	4.75	1.51	**.556**	.103
6. Drink/drugs1: "Painfully drunk" STATUS	4.95	1.53	**.723**	.006
7. Drink/drugs2: "Guinness drink" IMAGE	2.45	1.41	**.462**	.158
8. Drink/drugs3: "Marijuana/Meth" IMAGE	5.81	1.26	**.632**	-.011
9. Drink/drugs4: "Drunk me nightmare" STATUS	4.71	1.47	**.751**	-.008
10. Criticism1: "Lecturers/waste of time" STATUS	3.96	1.56	**.730**	-.026
11. Criticism2: "Weighing paycheck" STATUS	5.19	1.48	**.631**	-.079
12. Criticism3: "VC vs. Grad pay fairness" STATUS	3.52	1.62	**.630**	-.034
13. Criticism4: "No tip" STATUS	4.51	1.62	**.592**	.045
14. Spelling1: "Weather you win" STATUS	3.11	1.75	-.096	**.777**
15. Spelling2: "Definately" STATUS	2.46	1.40	.136	**.712**
16. Spelling3: "Their" & "wot" STATUS	3.66	1.74	.262	**.548**
17. Spelling4: "omg" & "lol" STATUS	2.17	1.34	-.029	**.832**

The two-factor solution illustrated in Table 12 produced a highly acceptable KMO statistic of .905, with Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 1529.09, $p <$ .001. The solution accounted for 45.95% of total variance, though produced a relatively low average communality of .46 for the number of components and sample size (Kaiser, 1960). The 13 variables loading onto the first component in this rotated solution appeared to share the commonality of referring to the risky *content* conveyed by the posts, whilst the remaining 4 variables loading onto the second component appeared to refer to the communicative *style* of the risky posts. The following section now outlines the independent and dependent variables subsequently used within the current study.

7.2.4 Independent Variables

Addressing the first research question (**RQ_{4a}**) posed in the current study, **intention to start actively applying for jobs** was measured by a single item:

"*When do you intend to start actively applying for job positions?*" Participants were prompted to indicate their response on a 6-point Likert Scale, anchored at 1 (I have already started) and 6 (Within the next year). A single item was also used to address the third research question (**RQ$_{4c}$**), measuring **trust in Facebook privacy settings**. Specifically, respondents were asked to use a 7-point Likert Scale anchored at 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 7 (Strongly Agree) to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement, "*I trust my privacy settings to successfully prevent employers from finding any Facebook content that could limit my job prospects.*"

As described in Section 7.2.2, the final measure of **psychological distance** (**RQ$_{4b}$**) consisted of five statements describing prospective employers looking at the Facebook profiles of job applicants. For four of the statements, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert Scale anchored at 1 (Strongly Disagree) and 7 (Strongly Agree), whereas for the remaining item they were asked to indicate the point at which they felt employers would be looking at their own Facebook profile, anchored at 1 (They will already be looking) and 7 (Never). Reliability analysis indicated satisfactory internal consistency for the subsequent composite measure (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$). Scores appeared to be normally distributed (Shapiro-Wilks Test = .991, $p = .122$, n.s.), and all reverse-scored items were reversed in the analysis so that larger scores represented higher psychological distance.

7.2.5 Dependent Variables

As detailed in Section 7.2.3, the final dependent variable (DV) measures of **perceptions of professional risk** were constructed from ratings of professional risk in relation to 17 vignettes illustrating risky Facebook posts. Using a 7-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (Not Risky At All) to 7 (Extremely Risky), participants were prompted to rate the level of professional risk they felt that the post represented in terms of limiting job prospects if such a post were to be found on their own profile. The first DV consisted of 13 vignettes and was labelled Content-based Professional Risk (see Table 12, Factor Loading 1), with

reliability analysis indicating good internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .88). The second DV consisted of 4 vignettes and was labelled Style-based Professional Risk (see Table 12, Factor Loading 2), with reliability analysis indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .74).

7.2.6 Procedure

Appendix D shows the full structure of the survey used in the present study, which was administered using the Qualtrics (2012) online survey platform. The overall structure was presented to every participant in the same standardised order, although the psychological distance items and Facebook vignettes were presented within randomised blocks to minimise any potential impact of order effects. A standardised order was adopted primarily so that participants would be asked to rate the professional riskiness of the Facebook vignettes *after* having responded to items relating to the psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook. The rationale for this was so that beliefs relating to psychological distance in this context could, in a sense, be primed prior to rating the riskiness of the vignettes, thus reflecting the predictive direction of the second hypothesis (**H2**) in the study (see Section 7.1).

The specific structure of the survey was as follows. The first section posed a number of background questions relating to the use of Facebook and characteristics of the network. This was followed by a short section asking participants to indicate their use of privacy settings on the site, and their perceived trust in them. The third section prompted participants to indicate their responses to the items measuring psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook. The fourth section then asked participants to rate the professional riskiness of the short Facebook vignettes. In the final section of the survey, participants were asked to provide basic demographic details regarding their age and gender, followed by questions relating to their current university, the course they were enrolled upon, their intended job sector following graduation, and their intentions to start actively applying for jobs. The closing

page of the survey provided participants with a written debrief and the opportunity to enter into a free prize draw.

7.3 FINDINGS

7.3.1 Network Characteristics

The majority of the students surveyed indicated having used Facebook for between 4 to 7 years (223, 87%). Additionally, modal and median responses indicated that respondents typically spent around 30 to 60 minutes a day actively using the site (78, 30.4%), though almost half (122, 47.7%) reported spending an hour or more doing so. The modal and median network size reported was 300 – 399 (47, 18.4%), which was broadly in line with the median figure of 300 reported by Madden et al. (2013), though slightly lower than for the students sampled in Study 3 (see Section 7.3.1). Also reflecting the findings of Study 3, 91.4% (235) reported restricting the content on their Facebook profiles to friends only, with over half agreeing to some extent (133, 51.8%) that they could trust their settings to prevent employers from accessing any potentially risk content, and just over one-third disagreeing (95, 37%).

7.3.2 Psychological Distance of Employer Surveillance on Facebook

Responses to the psychological distance measures revealed a number of points about the beliefs of final-year undergraduate students in relation to the surveillance of their Facebook profiles by employers. As illustrated in Figure 9, over three-fifths of the sample (*Hyp2:* 159, 61.9%) agreed that it was almost certain that employers would be looking at their profile to judge their suitability as a candidate, whilst in comparison, just under one-quarter of the students surveyed disagreed (61, 23.7%). Similarly, almost two-thirds of the sample (*Hyp1:* 162, 63%) disagreed that it was highly unlikely that employers would be interested in looking at their profile, whilst around one-quarter agreed (62, 24.1%). In combination, these responses appear to indicate that most of the students believed employer surveillance of their Facebook profile to be a likely

event; a finding as indicated by Vicknair et al. (2010) and more recently, Root and McKay (2014).

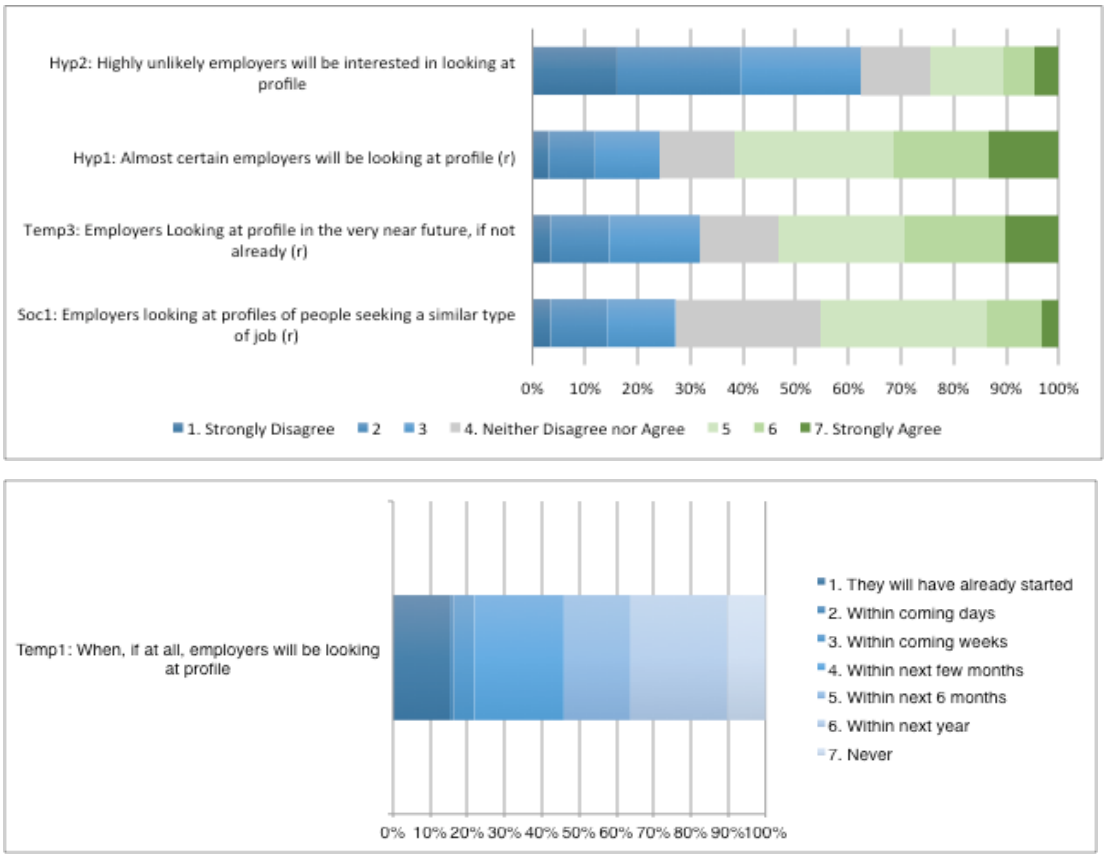


Figure 9. Distribution of Responses to the Psychological Distance Variables

With regards to the social dimension of psychological distance, just under half of the sample (*Soc1:* 117, 45.5%) agreed that employers were most likely to look at the profiles of people seeking a similar type of job to themselves, whilst just over one-quarter disagreed (69, 26.8%). This would appear to indicate that almost twice as many students believed that employers would be likely to judge the Facebook profiles of people intending on entering similar professions to themselves than not. Nevertheless, as indicated in reports published by SHRM (2013), Jobvite (2014b), and Acas (Broughton et al., 2013), social recruiting appears to be prevalent across a range of industry sectors, meaning that few professions are likely to be ommitted from the practice.

In terms of the temporal dimension of psychological distance, just over half of the sample (*Temp3*: 137, 53.3%) agreed that the event of employers looking at their Facebook profile would happen in the very near future, if not already, whilst almost a third disagreed with this proposition (81, 31.5%). Additionally, when asked about the point at which they believed this event would occur, only 15.2% (*Temp1*: 39) of students reported that they thought employers would have already started, whereas one-tenth (67, 10.1%) conveyed the belief that employers would never look at their profile. Therefore, the remaining three-quarters of the sample (192, 74.7%) indicated the view that potential employers would be looking at their Facebook profile at some point in the coming year, with the median response indicating that most felt that this would occur within the coming 6 months.

7.3.3 Perceptions of Professionally Risky Behaviour on Facebook

The current section outlines how the final-year students rated the professional riskiness of the 20 Facebook post vignettes. First, the vignettes representing content-based professional risk appeared to be perceived as being particularly risky when they related to drink or drug use, involved derogatory comments, or, in some cases, involved work-based criticism. As illustrated in Figure 10, the vignette with the greatest rating of professional risk was in reference to using marijuana and methamphetamines (*Drink3*: $\bar{x}$ = 5.81, SD = 1.26), while posting about getting "painfully drunk" (*Drink1*: $\bar{x}$ = 4.95, SD = 1.53) and being a drunken "nightmare" (*Drink4*: $\bar{x}$ = 4.71, SD = 1.47) attracted similarly high ratings of professional risk. Also receiving relatively high ratings of risk were derogatory posts referring to weight (*Derog3*: $\bar{x}$ = 4.75, SD = 1.51) and religion (*Derog1*: $\bar{x}$ = 4.47, SD = 1.58), in addition to work-related criticisms referring to the salary associated with a job offer (*Crit2*: $\bar{x}$ = 5.19, SD = 1.48) and a small tip left by customers (*Crit4*: $\bar{x}$ = 4.51, SD = 1.62).

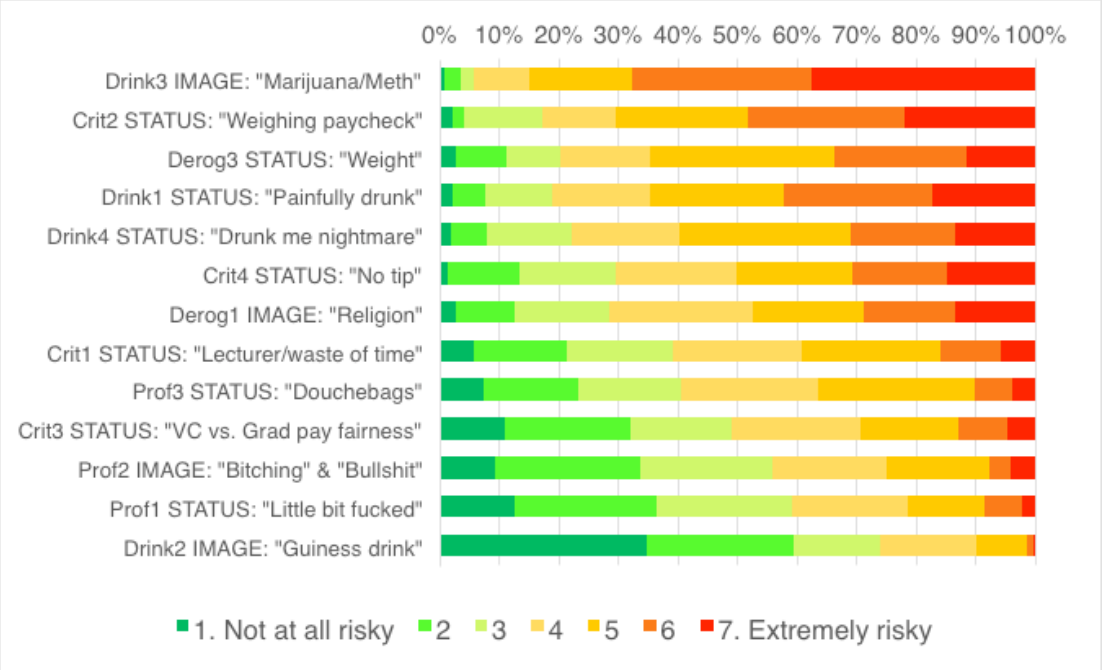


Figure 10. Risk Perceptions of Content-Based Professionally Risky Facebook Posts

Figure 10 also illustrates how the use of profanity in posts was perceived as being relatively lower in risk (*Prof1*: $\bar{x}$ = 3.25, SD = 1.50; *Prof2*: $\bar{x}$ = 3.37, SD = 1.52; and *Prof3*: $\bar{x}$ = 3.78, SD = 1.49). Similarly two vignettes representing work-based criticism, in the form of criticising a university lecturer (*Crit1*: $\bar{x}$ = 3.96, SD = 1.56) and Vice-Chancellor (*Crit3*: $\bar{x}$ = 3.52, SD = 1.62) received slightly lower ratings, possibly because of their reference to professionals within the university rather than an external workplace. The photo-based vignette of an individual pictured with an alcoholic drink received the lowest rating of professional risk amongst these vignettes (*Drink2*: $\bar{x}$ = 2.45, SD = 1.41), despite it being adapted from a Facebook post that led to the real-life termination of employment for a young high-school teacher in the United States (Sullivan, 2011).

With regards to the vignettes representing style-based professional risk, Figure 11 illustrates how participants rated all four posts representing spelling or grammatical errors as being relatively low in terms of professional risk. Indeed, analysis of the difference between mean scores for content- and style-based professional risk indicated the latter as being perceived as significantly less risky ($\bar{x}$ = 4.21 vs. 2.85, t (1, 256) = 20.41, p < .001).

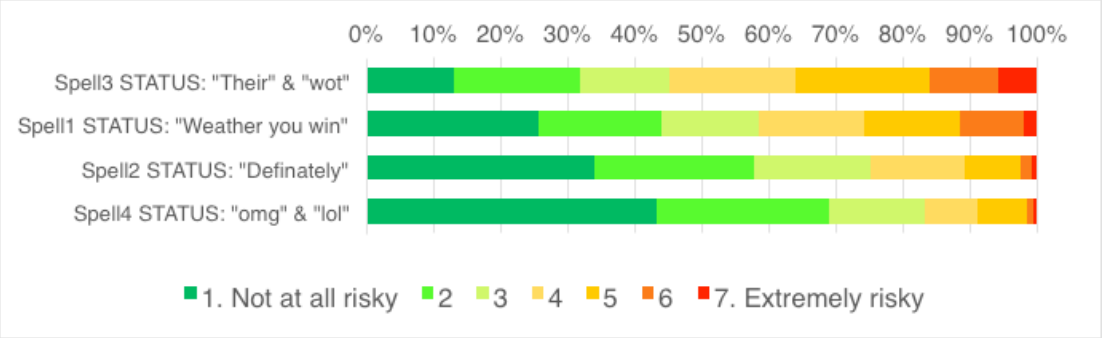


Figure 11. Risk Perceptions of Style-Based Professionally Risky Facebook Posts

In particular, the post including the common web-based abbreviations of "omg" ("oh my God") and "lol" ("laugh out loud") was rated as least risky (*Spell1*: $\bar{x}$ = 3.11, SD = 1.75), whereas the post misspelling "their" and "wot" received the highest rating of professional risk for the style-based vignettes (*Spell3*: $\bar{x}$ = 3.66, SD = 1.74).

7.3.4 Predicting Perceptions of Professional Risk on Facebook

The following analysis addressed the three research questions outlined in Section 7.1. The first two questions (**RQ$_{4a}$** and **RQ$_{4b}$**) related to whether intentions to start actively applying for jobs and the psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook would influence perceptions of professional risk on the site. Specifically, it was predicted that more immediate intentions (**H1**) and lower psychological distance (**H2**) would each predict higher ratings of professional risk. Two hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted, with one model predicting ratings of risk for content-based professionally risky posts, and the second doing similarly for style-based professionally risky posts. The variable measuring intention to start applying for jobs was entered as the first step of the model, with the variable measuring psychological distance entered as the second step.

The overall sample size of 257 participants exceeded the minimum thresholds proposed by Green (1991) for testing multivariate models and the individual predictors within them, and achieved satisfactory power in accordance with Cohen's (1988) recommendations. Residuals in both models

were screened for normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity, with VIF and Tolerance statistics and collinearity and casewise diagnostics found to be within acceptable limits (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Independence of the residuals was confirmed by the Durbin-Watson (1951) value produced, and inspection of P/P plots for individual predictors and the overall model revealed no marked issues. Finally, the adequate internal consistency of the psychological distance variable (α = .75) satisfied Osborne and Waters' (2002) emphasis on the importance of using reliable measures in multivariate analysis.

In contrast to the first hypothesised relationship (**H1**), the zero-order correlations presented in Table 13 illustrate how intention to start applying for jobs was not significantly related to ratings of risk in relation to either content-based (r = -.023, p = .355) or style-based professionally risky posts on Facebook (r = -.034, p = .295). Despite its small effect size, the variable was, however, positively related to psychological distance (r = .112, p < .05), suggesting that students who intended on starting to apply for jobs later in their final year also considered employer surveillance of their Facebook profile to be more psychologically distant. Indeed, further inspection revealed that the relationship between intention to start applying and temporal distance (*Temp1*: r = .209, p < .001) appeared to contribute most significantly to this finding.

In partial support of the second hypothesis (**H2**), psychological distance demonstrated a moderate effect size through its significant negative relationship with ratings of risk in relation to content-based professionally risky posts (r = -.295, p < .001), although this only approached significance for ratings of style-based professionally risky posts (r = -.096, p = .063, n.s.). Indeed, further inspection of Table 13 indicates how all five psychological distance variables demonstrated significant negative relationships with ratings of content-based professionally risky posts, whereas only two variables (*Hyp2* and *Temp3*) indicated significant negative relationships with ratings of style-based professionally risky posts on Facebook.

Table 13. Zero-order Correlations Between Scores for the Main Variables of Interest, with Means and Standard Deviations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	$\bar{x}$	SD
1. Trust in Privacy Settings	1										4.27	1.81
2. Intention to Start Job Applications	-.085	1									3.36	1.14
3. Soc1: Similar Type of Job (r)	.026	.068	1								3.81	1.37
4. Hyp1: Certainty Employers Will Look (r)	.070	.013	**.419*** **	1							3.32	1.56
5. Hyp2: Highly Likely Employers Will Be Interested	**.124***	-.012	**.254*** **	**.522*** **	1						3.19	1.65
6. Temp1: When Employers Will Look	.050	**.209*** **	**.186*** **	**.280*** **	**.289*** **	1					3.63	1.55
7. Temp3: Looking in Near Future (r)	**.112***	.098	**.347*** **	**.574*** **	**.482*** **	**.392*** **	1				3.56	1.61
8. Psychological Distance	**.105***	**.112***	**.590*** **	**.783*** **	**.725*** **	**.637*** **	**.790*** **	1			3.67	1.14
9. Content-related Professional Risk	-.069	-.023	**-.127***	**-.215*** **	**-.273*** **	**-.161** **	**-.276*** **	**-.295*** **	1		4.21	.97
10. Style-related Professional Risk	-.061	-.034	.029	-.042	**-.144***	-.052	**-.131***	-.096	**.518*** **	1	2.85	1.17
11. Total Risk	-.075	-.029	-.094	**-.186*** **	**-.264*** **	**-.146** **	**-.263*** **	**-.268*** **	**.966*** **	**.721*** **	3.89	.92

*** $p < .001$ level (one-tailed); ** $p < .01$ level (one-tailed); * $p < .05$ level (one-tailed)*

Table 14. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis of the Risk Perception of Content- and Style-Based Professionally Risky Content on Facebook (n = 257)

	Block 1		Block 2	
	β	*t*	β	*t*
Model 1: Risk Perceptions of Content-based Professionally Risky Posts				
Intention to Start Applying for Jobs	-.023	-.37	.010	.16
Psychological Distance of Employer Surveillance			**-.296**	**-4.91*** **
Model 2: Risk Perceptions of Style-based Professionally Risky Posts				
Intention to Start Applying for Jobs	-.034	-.54	-.023	-.37
Psychological Distance of Employer Surveillance			-.093	-1.48

Model 1: R^2 = .023 for Block 1, **Δ** R^2 = .087 for Block 2 (p < .001)
Model 2: R^2 = .034 for Block 1, **Δ** R^2 = .009 for Block 2 (p = .14, n.s.)
.05 level (one-tailed), **.01 level (one-tailed), *..001 level (one-tailed)*

As confirmed by Table 14, the first block of both hierarchical multiple regression models indicated that intention to start applying for jobs was not a significant predictor of variance in ratings of risk for either content- or style-based professionally risky posts on Facebook. The non-significance of the R^2 values (.023 and .034, respectively) for this first step of the models underlined the lack of support for the first hypothesis (**H1**) in the current study.

In contrast, the second block of the models presented in Table 8 indicated that when controlling for intention to start applying for jobs, the psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook significantly predicted ratings of risk in relation to content-based professionally risky posts (β = -.296, p < .001), though not for style-based professionally risky posts (β = -.093, p = .140). Subsequently, the overall model for predicting ratings of content-based professionally risky Facebook posts was significant, $F(2, 254)$ = 12.12, p < .001, R^2 = .08), with psychological distance accounting for a .087 change in R^2 in the model. This figure represents a small-to-medium effect size

according to the thresholds proposed by Cohen (1988). Conversely, the model for predicting ratings of risk in relation to style-based professionally risky Facebook posts was non-significant, $F(2, 254) = 1.24$, $p = 2.91$, $R^2 = .02$, n.s.). Therefore, the second hypothesis (**H2**) was partially supported.

The third research question (**RQ$_{4c}$**) of the study enquired whether the level of trust placed in Facebook privacy settings to prevent employers from viewing content would relate to the psychological distance of employer surveillance, predicting a positive association between the two (**H3**). Though representing only a small effect size, Table 13 illustrates support for this hypothesis ($r = .105$, $p < .05$). Specifically, the finding presents tentative evidence to suggest that final-year students who indicated placing greater trust in their Facebook privacy settings also reported greater psychological distance of employer surveillance on the site. Nevertheless, the small effect size warrants caution in seeking to form wider generalisations about the meaning of the relationship, particularly as causality cannot be inferred from the cross-sectional design. The following section now turns to discuss the implications of the findings presented in the chapter.

7.4 DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study raise a number of points relating to how young adults approaching the college-to-work transition perceive professional risk on social media. First, 90 percent of the students indicated the belief that employers would be looking at their Facebook profiles at some point in the coming year. Additionally, employer surveillance on Facebook was perceived by students as being particularly likely for those applying for jobs within similar professions to themselves. Second, the young people surveyed appeared to be particularly attuned to the professional risk associated with posting content depicting drink and illegal drug use, derogatory posts about others, and aspects of work-related criticism. In contrast, the use of profanity and spelling and grammar errors were perceived as representing relatively low levels of professional risk.

These findings demonstrate a number of parallels with Root and McKay's (2014) more recent examination of student awareness of social recruiting. First, a similar proportion of undergraduate students (80%) indicated that prospective employers would be likely or very likely to be searching for applicants on Facebook. Additionally, Root and McKay (2014) identified two factors in their analysis of professionally risky behaviours: first, posts where the content involved profanity, references to sex, alcohol, drugs, and negative comments about past and present employers, and second, posts that were about interactions with others and written communication, such as spelling and grammar. Further reflecting the findings of the current study, posts relating to the former type of risky behaviour were rated as being significantly more important to employers than those relating to the latter.

In combination with the findings of Root and McKay (2014), the current study indicates that posts conveying poor communication skills, such as incorrect use of spelling or grammar, may represent an important "blind spot" in the knowledge of professionally risky behaviour amongst young adults yet to enter the workplace. Indeed, the social media policies analysed in Study 1 of the current thesis illustrated how most organisations expect their employees to pay close attention to communication style when interacting with others through the technology (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1). Perhaps even more strikingly, all of the social recruiting studies cited in Table 9 indicated that evidence of poor communication skills on social media represented a key factor leading prospective employers and recruiters to reject applicants (CareerBuilder, 2012; Cross-Tab, 2010; Jobvite, 2014b; Reppler, 2011).

Although previous research has indicated that being "on the market" as a job-seeker is related to increased concern for their professional image online (R. Miller et al., 2012), the findings of the current study found little support for a similar role in predicting ratings of professional risk. However, intention to start applying for jobs was positively related to psychological distance. This appears to support the interpretation offered in Study 3 for why undergraduate students

preparing to enter their final year of study considered the professional consequences of their actions more frequently than students at other levels of study. Specifically, the relationship indicates that final year students within the current study who intended on starting to apply for jobs in the near future also perceived the presence of a professional audience on Facebook to be psychologically closer, and vice versa.

The most notable finding of this study was that the psychological distance with which students construed prospective employers to be looking at their Facebook profile predicted their perception of content-based professional risk on the site. Reflecting the findings of previous studies examining psychological distance and risk perception in different contexts (e.g. Carvalho et al., 2008; Chandran & Menon, 2004; Fischhoff et al., 2003; Spence et al., 2012), the closer the event of employer surveillance was perceived to occur, the greater the ratings of risk in relation to vignettes depicting drink and illegal drug use, derogatory posts about others, profanity, and work-related criticism. In contrast, no significant effect of psychological distance was found in predicting ratings of risk for vignettes representing poor spelling and grammar. This may have been due to the aforementioned apparent lack of awareness amongst most students that such behaviour even posed a risk to professional reputation.

The identification of a relationship between psychological distance and perceptions of professional risk on social media is an important finding for two key reasons. First, it extends the respective bodies of research on psychological distance and risk perception to the domain of social media; a context in which the role of psychological distance had been hypothesised (e.g. R. Miller et al., 2010; R. Miller et al., 2012) but yet to be empirically addressed. Additionally, with most studies of psychological distance finding effects through the use of experimental protocols to prime low or high levels of construal (e.g. Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope et al., 2007), the current study nevertheless found modest effects from using a scale-based measure developed specifically for the research. The findings therefore add to the limited number of

studies to have found significant effects using scale-based measures of psychological distance (e.g. Spence et al., 2012).

Second, the relationship between psychological distance and risk perception may have important implications for understanding how to encourage risk prevention behaviour amongst young adults. Indeed, risk perception has been found to predict a range of health behaviours, including the decision to receive vaccinations (Brewer et al., 2007; Brewer, Weinstein, Cuite, & Herrington Jr, 2004) and actions to limit the risk of cell-phone radiation (Chandran & Menon, 2004), in addition to preparedness to act on climate change (Spence et al., 2012). Although preparedness to engage in preventative behaviours was not specifically measured in the current study, a hypothesis informed by the aforementioned findings is that students indicating greater perceptions of risk may be more likely to seek to prevent the expression of professionally risky behaviour as a result.

Given the link identified between psychological distance and risk perception in the current study, the subsequent effects on engaging in risk prevention behaviours represents an important area for future study. For instance, Chandran and Menon (2004) demonstrated how simply framing communication about health risks in a more psychologically proximal, concrete way not only led to increased perceptions of risk, but greater engagement in actions to address the risk. The findings of this study suggest that it may be useful to consider framing communication about content-based professional risk on social media in a similar way, although the findings also suggest that this approach may be ineffective for communicating style-based risk, for which students appeared to lack awareness and psychological distance had no significant effect. In this case, focusing on improving knowledge of the risk posed by poor spelling and grammar online may represent a more effective intervention.

Whilst representing only a small effect size, the positive relationship between psychological distance of employer surveillance and trust in Facebook

privacy settings was an additional finding with potentially significant implications for understanding the professionally risky behaviour of young adults on social media. Though inference of causation is not possible from the cross-sectional findings, the positive association found indicated that greater trust in privacy controls to maintain private and professional boundaries on Facebook was linked with the construal of professional audience online in more psychologically distant, abstract terms. Subsequently, it may be that the feeling of relative "safety" discussed by employees interviewed in Study 2 in relation to their restricted Facebook profiles (see Chapter 5, Section 5.3.4) was influenced by their trust in the site's privacy settings, helping to make restricted audiences seem psychologically distant.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented in this chapter represent a pivotal point in this thesis with respect to understanding why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour on social media, despite being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. Specifically, for Facebook behaviours where the professional risk is associated with style of communication, such as poor use of spelling or grammar, a key issue appears to be the lack of awareness that it could lead to professionally damaging consequences. In contrast, for online behaviours where the potential risks are seemingly better understood, such as posts featuring profanity, derogatory language, depiction of alcohol or drug use, and work-related criticism, perceptions of professional risk are influenced by the psychological distance of a professional audience online. Specifically, perceptions of professional risk on Facebook are found to decrease as prospective employers become more psychologically distant.

Missing from the analysis presented in this study, however, is an indication of the types of incidents or events that might lead young adults to construe the presence of professional audience on social media as psychologically proximal. Indeed, the findings of the current study indicated

considerable variation in how final year students construed the psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook, yet why this should be remains unclear. Additionally, the study was unable to examine how increased perceptions of professional risk on social media may translate into digital reputation management behaviours, and how these might differ depending on the specific situation. Therefore, it is with these research gaps in mind that the Study 5 now turns to examine the antecedents and consequences of incidents that lead young adults to consider risk to professional reputation whilst using social media before, during, following organisational entry.

8

STUDY 5: PERCEPTIONS AND MANAGEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL RISK ON SOCIAL MEDIA PRIOR TO, DURING, AND FOLLOWING ORGANISATIONAL ENTRY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

As the first experience of organisational entry for many young adults, the college-to-work transition is identified as one of the most significant, and potentially difficult, periods of change that individuals will face in their careers (Hettich, 2010; Ng & Feldman, 2007; Polach, 2004). First, successfully negotiating the interview stage involves careful impression management, with favourable judgments influenced by the skilled implementation of self-promotion and ingratiation self-presentation tactics (e.g. Barrick et al., 2009; Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Following entry, the phase of organisational socialisation then requires extensive adjustment to the organisation (e.g. Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003), with new employees reducing uncertainty through a range of information-seeking behaviours, including observing and interacting with colleagues (V. D. Miller & Jablin, 1991; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

With the increasing integration of social media into recruitment practices (e.g. Broughton et al., 2013; Doherty, 2010; Jobvite, 2014b) and various organisational functions (e.g. Wollan et al., 2011), the college-to-work transition appears even more complex for young adults in the digital age. According to Cable and Kay (2012, p. 360), "*When people join new employers, they get a fresh chance to define who they are*". However, for recent graduates with potentially vast digital footprints that reflect years of adolescent interactions with friends, the level of control over which aspects of their social identity may be presented

to prospective employers and new colleagues online is profoundly challenged by the persistence, visibility, accessibility, and virality of data upon social media (Ellison & boyd, 2013; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). The perception and subsequent management of risk to professional reputation on social media are therefore crucial phenomena to understand as young adults approach the college-to-work transition.

Indeed, Study 3 indicated that undergraduate students preparing to enter their final year of study considered the professional consequences of their interactions with social media more frequently than those at other stages, and that those about to graduate reported the greatest use of profile modification strategies, such as deleting potentially risky content. Examining one theoretical interpretation of these findings, Study 4 found that the psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook during the final year of study predicted perceptions of professional risk in relation to particular types of content on the site. In particular, construing the presence of a professional audience on Facebook in more psychologically proximal terms predicted increased ratings of professional risk when presented with posts portraying profanity, derogatory language, the use of alcohol and drugs, and work-related criticism.

The factors that lead young adults to consider risk to their professional reputation whilst using social media prior to organisational entry are currently unclear, however. With the findings of Study 3 suggesting that the process of seeking employment may play a role, Study 4 indicated that whilst more immediate intentions to start applying for jobs were associated with psychologically proximal perceptions of professional audience on Facebook, the relationship was relatively weak and the former was not directly associated with perceptions of professional risk. However, other factors may influence perceptions of risk during this phase, such as hearing or reading reports about "Facebook firings" or social recruiting in the media, or perhaps receiving careers advice from within the university.

As an illustration, most job-seeking students in Study 4 reported being aware that employers would be monitoring their Facebook profile during their final year, but how and why this should be has yet to be examined. Indeed, understanding the types of event or incidents that influence students to construe professional risk on social media in more proximal, concrete terms may be particularly important for identifying ways in which interventions could be designed to mitigate damage to professional reputation. Specifically, increased risk perceptions have been found to lead to greater engagement in prevention behaviours (e.g. Brewer et al., 2007; Chandran & Menon, 2004; Spence et al., 2012), which in the context of social media could be interpreted in terms of strategies of digital reputation management. Therefore, the first research question of this study was,

RQ$_{5a}$ *What types of events lead young adults to consider risk to their professional reputation when using social media during the college-to-work transition?*

Identifying the antecedents of professional risk awareness amongst young adults addresses only part of the overall picture, however. Understanding how individuals respond to particular types of event or situation in which professional risk becomes salient is also an important matter. As indicated by the university employees interviewed in Study 2, social media users engage in a wide range of strategies in order to maintain a desirable professional reputation online. Reflecting the model proposed by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013), two approaches appear to be particularly prevalent: first, carefully self-regulating and modifying the nature of content shared online, and second, controlling the level of access that online audiences have to it.

Furthermore, as the findings of both Studies 1 and 2 indicated, the use of social media can create professional risk not only in terms of potentially damaging reputational consequences, but also in terms of beneficial opportunities. Therefore, to examine the complexity of digital reputation management across organisational entry, the second research question this study was,

RQ$_{5b}$. *What types of digital reputation management strategies do young adults engage in upon social media in order to address professionally risky incidents?*

In recent years, a range of online services have been developed with the aim of helping social media users with the digital reputation management process (e.g. Persona, 2015; Reppler, 2015; Secure.Me, 2015; SimpleWash, 2015). Referred to henceforth as digital reputation management systems (DRMSs), the services work by prompting users to link their social media profiles, subsequently applying linguistic algorithms to analyse the accessible text-based content. The systems then present alerts through the web-based user interface for any content interpreted as posing a potential risk to professional reputation. Though representing a potentially useful service for young adults, the assumptions of professional risk underpinning the algorithms are unclear, and relatively little is known about their utility in assisting users with the digital reputation management. Therefore, the third, and final, research question posed in this study was,

RQ$_{5c}$. *How useful are digital reputation management systems in helping young adult users to identify and manage risk to professional reputation upon social media?*

8.2 DESIGN

8.2.1 Participants

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with young adults in full-time employment at the time of data collection in April 2014. Interviewees were aged between 20 and 30-years-old, and the sample consisted of 15 females and 5 males. In order to maintain consistency across the sample, all interviewees were required to have entered their respective organisations within the 18 months preceding data collection. As indicated by Table 15, of the 20 interviewees, 16 were members of structured graduate management trainee programmes and 4 were members of a "year-in-placement" apprenticeship scheme, and thus set to return to their respective universities for a final year of undergraduate study.

The schemes typically lasted for between one and two years, and spanned a range of sectors in the sample, including higher education (7, 35%), retail (5, 25%), health (6, 30%), finance (1, 5%) and the civil service (1, 5%).

Members of graduate management trainee schemes were targeted specifically on the basis that it enabled the research questions to be examined with employees across a range of sectors, whilst retaining an element of consistency in the level of role and type of work conducted within the job. Graduate schemes were identified and contacted by the researcher via both email and social media pages set up by the schemes on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. A snowball sampling approach was adopted for each scheme once an appropriate gatekeeper within the organisation had been identified. With the exception of the financial organisation, all of the employers represented in the sample featured large workforces consisting of several thousand employees, with participants located across three major cities based within the United Kingdom.

Though it was the intention to only sample graduates who had made a direct transition from study to the workplace, the practical constraints of the sampling technique used and limited time resources available meant that the transitional period experienced by interviewees was more complex than anticipated. Specifically, the sample was characterised by three broad types of professional transition: first, individuals having started employment directly following graduation (*Student → Graduate Scheme,* n = 10); second, individuals having started employment after a short transitional period of work temporarily following graduation (*Student → Temporary Work → Graduate Scheme,* n = 6); and third, individuals having started employment as part of a placement year within their university course (*Student → Industry Placement → Student,* n = 4). These types of transition are represented in Table 15 as [1], [2], and [3], respectively.

Table 15. Sample and Network Characteristics of the 20 Interviewee

Interviewee	*Gender*	*Job Type*	*Sector*	*Transition*	*Social Media Sites*
Kirsten	Female	Grad Trainee	Higher Education	[2]	FB, Twtr
Emma	Female	Grad Trainee	Higher Education	[2]	FB, Twt,r Blog, LI
Anne	Female	Grad Trainee	Higher Education	[1]	FB, Twtr, Blog, LI
Jonathan	Male	Grad Trainee	Higher Education	[1]	FB, Twtr, LI
Carl	Male	Grad Trainee	Higher Education	[2]	FB, Twtr, LI
Cary	Female	Grad Trainee	Higher Education	[1]	FB, Twtr, G+, LI
James	Male	Grad Trainee	Higher Education	[2]	FB, Twtr, LI
Corinne	Female	Grad Trainee	Retail	[1]	FB, Twtr, Inst, LI
Nicholas	Male	Grad Trainee	Retail	[1]	FB, Twtr, MySp, LI
Heather	Female	Year-in-Industry	Retail	[3]	FB, Twtr, Inst
Natasha	Female	Year-in-Industry	Retail	[3]	FB, Twtr, LI
Karen	Female	Year-in-Industry	Retail	[3]	FB, Twtr
Sara	Female	Grad Trainee	Health	[1]	FB, Twtr, LI
Amelie	Female	Grad Trainee	Health	[1]	FB, Twtr, LI
Jo	Female	Grad Trainee	Health	[1]	FB, Twtr
Markus	Male	Year-in-Industry	Legal	[3]	FB, LI
Satveer	Female	Grad Trainee	Health	[2]	FB, Twtr, LI
Kristy	Female	Grad Trainee	Health	[2]	FB, Twtr, LI
Ava	Female	Grad Trainee	Health	[1]	FB, Twtr, MySp, LI
Taylor	Female	Grad Trainee	Civil Service	[2]	FB, Twtr, LI

Key: FB (Facebook), Twtr (Twitter), LI (LinkedIn), MySp (MySpace), G+ (Google Plus), Inst (Instagram), Blog

With regards to their network characteristics, Table 15 illustrates that the graduate trainees and year-in-industry interns interviewed in the current study discussed using an average of three social media sites each ($\bar{x}$ = 3.1). This was lower than the average of five reported elsewhere for 16 to 24-year-olds (GlobalWebIndex, 2014), but reflective of the finding that almost half of over 1,500 Internet users in one recent survey reported using two or more social media sites (Duggan et al., 2015). As with the young adults sampled in Studies 3 and 4 of this thesis, all interviewees reported using Facebook (100%), which was closely followed by Twitter (95%). In contrast to the students in Study 3, most interviewees reported using LinkedIn (80%).

8.2.2 Method and Procedure

The current study used semi-structured interviews in combination with two methods: first, the Critical Incident Technique (CIT: Flanagan, 1954) to examine

the types of events that had led young adults to consider risk to their professional reputation on social media (**RQ$_{5a}$**), and how they subsequently responded (**RQ$_{5b}$**), and second, the Think-Aloud Protocol (TAP: Ericsson & Simon, 1998, p. 181) to assess the utility of digital reputation management systems (DRMSs) in identifying professional risk (**RQ$_{5c}$**).

Initially developed as a method for conducing task analyses within organisational psychology, the application of CIT has evolved from its integration with observational methods towards the use of interviews for identifying critical events that help promote or detract from the effective performance of a particular activity (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005). Indeed, the core rationale underpinning the use of CIT in the current study was its structured approach to building upon the findings of Study 4 by examining the types of incident that may lead young adults to construe professional risk in more concrete, psychologically proximal terms. With its focus on examining both the antecedents and consequences of incidents, CIT was also used to identify consistencies in the types of reputation management strategies adopted in response to perceptions of professional risk.

Alternatively, the TAP was developed in human-computer interaction (HCI) research as a means for eliciting "*nonreactive verbalisations of thinking*" where "*individuals verbalize their thoughts without any, or at worst with minimal, reactive influences on their thinking*" (Ericsson & Simon, 1998, p. 181). The method has been shown to be particularly useful in providing insights into the decision-making processes of users when a concurrent approach is taken (e.g. Kuusela & Pallab, 2000). However, the current study used the TAP not to look specifically at cognitive processes, but rather to examine the utility of two DRMSs, and in particular the extent to which the information presented by the systems aligned with users' own understanding of professional risk.

Following the previously outlined sampling strategy (see Section 8.2.1), individuals who voluntarily registered their interest in participating were sent

an introductory email with an information sheet providing details about the study. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in both private and public settings, such as work-based offices and cafes. At the outset of each interview, the researcher checked for any questions requiring clarification and acquired both written and verbal consent to record audio from the interview for the purposes of consolidating note taking and transcription. Though Flanagan (1954) emphasised that CIT does not consist of a rigid set of rules for data collection, the five major steps proposed by Butterfield et al. (2005) were used to structure the approach taken in the current study, and which are integrated in the details to follow.

As outlined in protocol presented in Appendix E, interviewees were initially asked to provide background details about their current role and job search experience. Interviewees were then asked to talk about their use of social media during this transitional period, including their awareness of social recruiting. With reference to the CIT procedure outlined by Flanagan (1954) and Butterfield et al. (2005), interviewees were then prompted to recall any specific incidents prior to, during, or following organisational entry that led them to consider risk to their professional reputation whilst using social media. Follow-up questions were asked for each incident to elicit greater detail on the antecedents leading to the recalled incident, and in relation to how the interviewee subsequently responded. This phase of the interview was concluded once the interviewee could recall no further unique incidents.

Next, interviewees were presented with two publicly available, free-to-use DRMSs: Reppler (2015) and Persona (2015). Screenshots of the user interfaces for both of these systems are shown in Appendix E. Interviewees were asked to log in to each system via their social media accounts on a laptop provided by the interviewer, with all digital credentials erased in the presence of the interviewees at the close of the session. Interviewees were informed that their task was to use the systems to identify any content presented by the

interface that they felt would pose a risk to their professional reputation, whilst verbalising every thought as they perform the task. Following Ericsson and Simon's (1998) "*nonreactive verbalization of thinking*" approach, interviewees were asked to verbalise any questions that they had about the systems, but were informed that they would not be answered by the researcher during the task.

In accordance with the person-centred approach to social media research ethics adopted throughout the thesis (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4), interviewees were informed that they could share the details of any content flagged by the DRMSs that they wished, but that it would be reported anonymously and would not be observed directly by the interviewer. Once the set task of identifying potentially risky content had been completed for both systems, interviewees were asked to reflect on how DRMSs might be improved to help users manage their digital reputation more effectively. In total, each interview lasted for approximately 90 minutes. At the close of the session, the interviewer thanked the interviewee for their time and debriefed them on the main aims of the study, as outlined in Appendix E.

8.2.3 Analysis and Coding of Critical Incidents

According to Butterfield et al. (2005), the most important and difficult step in applying the CIT is in the analysis of the incidents identified. As hundreds of critical incidents can be challenging to work with, the core aim of the analysis was to "*create a categorization scheme that summarizes and describes the data in a useful manner*" (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 479), while avoiding sacrificing as little specificity of the incidents as possible. An initial analysis of the twenty, fully transcribed interviews led to the identification of 135 critical incidents in total. Each incident was subsequently evaluated on the basis that it satisfied two conditions: first, that it referred to a specific, time-bound incident, and second, that the interviewee explicitly identified a link between the incident and how it led them to consider risk to their professional reputation.

Drawing on a further criterion of accuracy proposed by Flanagan (1954), situations recalled by interviewees were only classified as critical incidents if they consisted of antecedent information leading to the incident, contained a sufficiently detailed description of the incident itself, and finally, described the interviewee's subsequent response. Applying this criterion, 21 incidents were identified that either lacked specificity, detail, or clarity in description, or sufficient relevance to professional risk. These incidents were removed from further analysis, creating a total of 114 critical incidents. Incidents were then sorted into a small set of tentative categories complete with brief category definitions. Working through the full set of 114 incidents, categories were redefined and extended into new categories as required, until all incidents had been classified.

Following discussion and feedback from two researchers independent to the data collection phase, the initial categorisation scheme was re-evaluated and re-categorised, yielding 20 categories of critical incident that were subsumed under six higher-level categories. Guiding this iterative phase was the intention to produce categories that cohered together meaningfully, but had clear and identifiable distinctions from other categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990). The definitions of these higher-level categories are provided in Table 16, with Table 17 illustrating the hierarchical structure of within which the lower level critical incident categories were subsumed.

To check the credibility and trustworthiness of the six higher-level categories, eight independent postgraduate students unfamiliar with the research categorised 25 percent of the 114 critical incidents into the six higher-level categories. Described by Butterfield et al. (2005) as "*independent judges placing incidents into categories*", Qualtrics (2012) online survey software was used to provide raters with the titles and full definitions of the six categories (see Table 16), who subsequently categorised randomly presented transcript excerpts, with a seventh "other" category provided for any that did not fit.

Table 16. Higher-Level Critical Incident Categories and Definitions of Category Membership

Incident Category	Definitions of Category Membership
Connection with Professional Others	Perceived professional risk as the result of an existing, or requested, connection with a professional other. Therefore, "connection" incidents cover both existing and requested Facebook friendships, Twitter followers, and LinkedIn connections with professional others, and may include fellow graduate trainees, colleagues, potential employers, or hiring managers.
Own Risky Interactions	Perceived professional risk as the result of own risky behaviour. Examples of such incidents might include self-identified posting of critical comments about work, initiating debates about controversial issues or engaging in other risky behaviours such as posting when angry, uploading risky photos, or using profane or derogatory language.
External Influencers of Risk Perception	Perceived professional risk as the result of information provided by an external source. Examples of such incidents might include media reports of professionally risky behaviour, direct observations of risky interactions by others, receiving advice or guidance from external sources such as parents, careers services, or employee guidelines, or anecdotally hearing about negative professional consequences experienced by other users of social media.
Risky Actions of Others Impacting on Self	Perceived professional risk as the result of other peoples' online actions impacting on them in some way. Examples of such incidents might include being tagged in risky photos and statuses by others, or being associated in some way with the risky behaviour of another social media user.
Use of Social Media for Work	Perceived professional risk as the result of using social media as part of professional work activity. Examples of such incidents might include the use of social media to interact with professional others such as senior colleagues or other organisations, or to share knowledge and information about professional interests.
Re-Establishing Social Connections	Perceived professional risk as result of relying upon social media to re-establish non-work, social connections.

The overall agreement rate in the credibility check was calculated as 75%, though as some researchers have rejected its robustness as a measure (e.g. Cohen, 1960), Fleiss Kappa inter-rater reliability analysis was conducted. This produced a Kappa value of .50, reflecting the lower end of an "intermediate-to-good" level of agreement according to Fleiss' (1981) proposed thresholds.

To address the second research question (**RQ$_{5b}$**), the 114 critical incidents were also analysed with respect to the responses that they elicited. Specifically, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify seven recurring themes in the types of responses discussed (see Table 18). These included the deletion or modification of content, the modification of privacy settings, the avoidance of risky responses, checking back through content, the deletion or deactivation of a profile, raised awareness of professional opportunities, and no action taken. With respect to the third research question (**RQ$_{5c}$**), thematic analysis was again used to identify recurring themes throughout the verbal protocols produced from interacting with the two DRMSs. The findings from both of these sets of analyses are integrated into the discussion in the following section, with direct quotes taken from the interview transcripts used to support key points, where appropriate.

8.3 FINDINGS

The main findings of this study are presented in two parts: first, the six higher-level incidents that led interviewees to consider professional risk whilst using social media across organisational entry (**RQ$_{5a}$**), and the seven types of response that typically resulted (**RQ$_{5b}$**); and second, the core themes relating to the utility of DRMSs for identifying professional risky behaviour on social media (**RQ$_{5c}$**).

Table 17 illustrates the prevalence of the six higher-level categories of critical incident across the sample. Of the six categories, four considerably exceeded Butterfield *et al's* (2005) recommended threshold of 25% for a category to be considered prevalent. However, as acknowledged by the authors, a low prevalence rate does not necessarily mean that a category should be disregarded from further analysis. Therefore, all six categories are included in the discussion to follow. Table 18 also indicates the prevalence of the seven types of response in relation to each of these six critical incident categories.

Each interviewee recalled an average of 5.7 incidents, and ranged between 1 and 12. The average for graduate trainees on schemes within the higher education and health sectors was 5.7 and 5.3, respectively, whilst for graduate trainees based in the retail sector it was slightly higher at 7.

Table 17. Categorisation of Higher- and Lower-Level Critical Incidents

	Category of Higher-Level Critical Incident Category of Lower-Level Critical Incident	**Number, Prevalence Across Sample**
1.	OWN RISKY INTERACTIONS 1.1 Self-posting of risky content 1.2 Old content	(23 Incidents, 80%)
2.	EXTERNAL INFLUENCERS OF RISK PERCEPTION 2.1. Media coverage 2.2. Negative professional consequences for others 2.3. Risky interactions by others 2.4. Advice from others 2.5. Professional use of social media by others 2.6. Feedback from recruiters 2.7. Social media policies for employees 2.8. Information in job application	(39 Incidents, 80%)
3.	CONNECTING WITH PROFESSIONAL OTHERS 3.1 Connecting with potential employers 3.2 Connecting with colleagues 3.3 Changing nature of personal-professional relationships 3.4 Unanticipated breach of privacy	(29 Incidents, 60%)
4.	USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR WORK PURPOSES 3.1 Using social media for work purposes 3.2 Seeking information on colleagues 3.3 Interacting with colleagues on social media for work 3.4 Personal branding	(15 Incidents, 50%)
5.	OTHERS' RISKY ACTIONS IMPACTING ON SELF 5.1. Others impacting on self	(6 Incidents, 20%)
6.	RE-ESTABLISHING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS 6.1. Losing contact with social connections	(2 Incidents, 10%)

Table 18. Categorisation of Responses to Critical Incidents

Category of Higher-Level Critical Incident Category of Response to Critical Incident	**Number (Prevalence of Responses)**
1. OWN RISKY INTERACTIONS	
Deletion/Modification of content	10 (38.5%)
No action taken	7 (26.9%)
Modification of privacy settings	4 (15.4%)
Avoidance of risky response	2 (7.7%)
Checking back through content	2 (7.7%)
Deletion/Deactivation of profile	1 (3.8%)
2. EXTERNAL INFLUENCERS OF RISK PERCEPTION	
Avoidance of risky response	14 (29.8%)
Modification of privacy settings	13 (27.7%)
Deletion/Modification of content	9 (19.1%)
Awareness of professional opportunity	4 (8.5%)
Deletion/Deactivation of profile	3 (6.4%)
Checking back through content	3 (6.4%)
No action taken	1 (2.1%)
3. CONNECTING WITH PROFESSIONAL OTHERS	
Modification of privacy settings	15 (44.2%)
Checking back through content	6 (17.7%)
Deletion/Modification of content	5 (14.7%)
Deletion/Deactivation of profile	3 (8.8%)
Awareness of professional opportunity	3 (8.8%)
No action taken	2 (5.8%)
4. USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR WORK PURPOSES	
Awareness of professional opportunity	7 (50%)
Modification of privacy settings	3 (21.4%)
Deletion/Modification of content	1 (7.1%)
Deletion/Deactivation of profile	1 (7.1%)
Avoidance of risky response	1 (7.1%)
No action taken	1 (7.1%)
5. OTHERS' RISKY ACTIONS IMPACTING ON SELF	
Modification of privacy settings	3 (42.8%)
Deletion/Modification of content	2 (28.6%)
Avoidance of risky response	1 (14.3%)
No action taken	1 (14.3%)
6. RE-ESTABLISHING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS	
Deletion/Modification of content	1 (25%)
Checking back through content	1 (25%)
Deletion/Deactivation of profile	1 (25%)
Modification of privacy settings	1 (25%)

Of the total 114 critical incidents recalled, 61% related to the use of Facebook, 23% to the use of Twitter, 9% to LinkedIn, and the remainder to blogs (3%), Google searches (2%), or undeclared social media platforms. The almost equally prevalent use of Facebook and Twitter throughout the sample (see Table 15) suggests that these findings do not simply reflect the dominance of Facebook, but rather, other possible factors to which the following sections now turn to discuss, with each category of critical incident addressed in turn.

8.3.1 Category I: Own Risky Interactions

Representing one-fifth of the total number of critical incidents (23, 20%), and reported by four-fifths of the interviewees (80%), one of the most prevalent factors leading the graduates and trainees to consider professional risk on social media was their own risky behaviour. Reflecting a key theme identified in both Studies 1 and 2, the identification of incidents that involved sharing personal views on potentially controversial or divisive topics were particularly prevalent. For instance, several interviewees recalled times where they had posted personal views about work-based issues to Facebook, which had subsequently led to extensive debate online. For instance, Jo, a trainee working in the health sector, described posting about a pay rise that she and her colleagues upon the trainee scheme were due to receive, and that had led to "*loads of comments.*" Despite having carefully selected the friends within her Facebook network, she *"ended up just deleting the whole post because I found it really inappropriate"*.

Similarly, Anne, a trainee within higher education, recalled an issue that had arisen during her time as an undergraduate student where she had expressed "*strong"* political views to her Facebook friends. Specifically, she described how *"a few comments really took off and had like twenty or thirty other comments. It wasn't good. Like, it was really people infuriated with what was posted."* Whilst Anne reported feeling justified in sharing her political views online as a student, she nevertheless removed it and the incident led her to avoid initiating similarly divisive debates on Facebook since starting in her graduate

trainee role, acknowledging that, "*I think that if I were to read that now, I would feel very uncomfortable because I could have said the same message in a more toned down way - or not said it on Facebook at all.*"

An important element to these particular examples was that the risk to reputation appeared to be attributed as much to the lack of control and increased attention attracted by the subsequent debate created by the posts as the content itself. In this respect, the incidents highlighted the reputational challenges posed by the affordance of spreadibility (boyd, 2014), or "virality" (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4.5) upon social media, whereby content can quickly reach a wider audience than initially intended. Indeed, as indicated in Table 18, the most prevalent response identified by interviewees in relation to their own risky behaviour was to delete or modify the content (38.5%), as also found in studies of regretful posting behaviour by Y. Wang et al. (2011) and Sleeper, Cranshaw, et al. (2013).

However, while deletion and modification were the most prominent responses outlined for incidents relating to Facebook, a rather more unexpected response was noted on Twitter. Specifically, risky behaviours were often described as having received no active response at all, despite the content being left open and accessible in line with the privacy norms for the platform (e.g. Krishnamurthy & Wills, 2008). For instance, Sara, a trainee in the health sector, recalled tweeting "*strong opinions*" about the UK Government's then Secretary of State for Health. By coincidence, she had subsequently been asked by her directors to meet the official just two days later as a representative of her department, though nevertheless opted to leave it online, "*because I thought deleting it sometimes almost makes it a bigger deal, and I'd got away with it.*"

Taylor, a trainee in the Civil Service, recalled a similar incident in which she had realised that fellow colleagues working within the government might see her highly critical past tweets about the leader of a political party. However, she described her decision not to delete it on the basis that "*they just never said*

anything, they obviously don't care that much." Additionally, Karen, an intern within retail, described tweeting a seemingly innocuous "*roll on the weekend"* to her Twitter followers to convey excitement about her forthcoming time off, but instead ended up reflecting on how her colleagues or employer might interpret the tweet ("*in someone else's eyes that could be seen as 'she hates her job, she's bored, she wants it to be the weekend already and it's only Tuesday.'")* However, like Sara and Taylor, she described opting to leave the content, acknowledging that, "*I'm just counting on the fact that they don't have Twitter and that they haven't looked for me - which is stupid of me I think."*

The decision to leave potentially professionally risky content upon Twitter to be viewed by others reflects elements of the relationship found between psychological distance and perceived risk in Study 4. Specifically, when interviewees described judging the presence of a professional audience upon their Twitter profile as being a psychologically distant event, they appeared to express little concern for the potential risk to their professional reputation and subsequently opted not to act. Indeed, this point was illustrated by both Kirsten, a trainee in higher education ("*I don't think anybody would really be bothered to trawl through many photos of me to find the couple that would be a bit odd.*"), and Corinne, a trainee within retail ("*I can't imagine* [employers] *going through everyone... It's just time consuming.*"). However, this perspective may have been professionally risky, with as many as three-fifths of organisations reportedly monitoring the online actions of their employees (KPMG, 2011).

8.3.2 Category II: External Influencers of Risk Perception

Representing just over one-third of the total number of critical incidents (39, 35%), and reported by four-fifths of the interviewees (80%), another highly prevalent factor leading the graduates and trainees to consider professional risk on social media was information and feedback provided by external sources. One consistent type of incident identified was receiving advice from others, which primarily occurred prior to organisational entry. One particularly

common source was parental advice, with almost half of the interviewees recalling incidents where their mother or father had prompted them to consider professional risk whilst preparing to apply for jobs (Heather: *"Well my Dad, he has this kind of strong belief that companies check your Facebook…"*).

The role of parents in educating their children about responsible use of social media appears to be as important as it is novel, with a number of the interviewees within the study describing the influence of parental insights into the professional expectations of online behaviour prior to the college-to-work transition. Specifically, a number of incidents related to situations where the parents of interviewees had either had to manage the professionally risky actions of others (Kirsten: "[My dad has] *done a lot of expert witness work and he said a lot of the budget goes on defending things that have been posted when using Facebook.*"), or directly experienced professional consequences themselves (Natasha: "*My Mum's a police officer … and she said a comment a couple of years ago … somebody somewhere had taken it the wrong way and she had to go into formal meetings and all sorts of things for it*.").

Parents were not the only source of external advice identified prior to organisational entry, however. In particular, roughly one-quarter of the interviewees recalled advice provided by their university's career service as having led them to consider risk to their professional reputation on social media. For instance, James, a trainee in higher education, recalled his experience as a final-year undergraduate, where his particular approach to digital reputation management had been influenced by his university careers service's advise "*that it was about making sure* [Facebook] *was locked up tight and there were no images and things like that easily searchable."* Indeed, many of the interviewees emphasised the priority afforded to "locking down" their privacy settings over managing content in response to the advice provided by others (see Table 18).

An additional type of external influence on perceptions of risk related to indirect experiences of professionally risky behaviour when using social media.

One example was the mainstream press coverage of employees or public figures, where they had been reprimanded for their professionally risky use of social media (Satveer: *"they used* [her posts] *to make her look like a villain. It made me think, 'but we all have those thoughts, everybody'"*). Another example was becoming aware of professional risk through cautionary anecdotes and gossip, such as those experienced through everyday working experience (Jo: "*I know that a lot of things have come up where I work where staff have put inappropriate things onto Facebook and action has been taken against them*").

One consistent pattern across incidents recalled of this type was that the protagonists at the centre of the stories often shared professional similarities with the interviewee. For instance, Sara, a trainee in the health service, recalled one incident in which a senior colleague and alumni of the same graduate scheme had been negatively profiled in the press along with excerpts from their social media accounts, leading her to conclude that, "*people who were me twenty-thirty years ago are now in a position where the media are interested in what they're doing. I think that, for me, really drove it home.*" Psychological distance may again assist in interpreting why these particular incidents were salient for interviewees, perhaps reflecting a form of social distance where professional risk was perceived as being more meaningful when the target was identified as being similar in some way (e.g. Trope et al., 2007).

8.3.3 Category III: Connecting with Professional Others

Representing one-quarter of the total number of critical incidents (29, 25%), and reported by three-fifths of the interviewees (60%), another prevalent factor leading the graduates and trainees to consider professional risk on social media was through connecting with other professionals on social media. Some of these incidents took the form of connections with prospective employers, which primarily occurred upon Twitter and LinkedIn. Specifically, many interviewees noted how useful both platforms were for building their professional reputation and positively influencing perceptions of employability. For instance, Jonathan

described an incident in which he had used Twitter to follow the director of a department he eventually intended on applying to, using the site as part of a deliberate strategy to raise his own profile as a candidate ("*Maybe it will pop up somewhere that 'hey, I follow you' and strike with your interests.*").

For many of the interviewees, however, incidents in which they were faced with connecting to a prospective employer were considered to be too professionally risky. For instance, Anne, a trainee in higher education, recalled an incident in which she had chosen to ignore a LinkedIn connection request from a hiring manager on the basis that she wanted her resume and covering letter to create the first impression rather than a professional networking profile. Similarly, Natasha recalled the realisation that one of the prospective employers that she had applied for whilst looking for jobs had started to follow her on Twitter, leaving her feeling uneasy about what they might be able to gauge about her personal life ("*I hate the thought of somebody being able to just read through my posts and see pictures of my family and things… that was when I really decided that I better take some action and just check"*). Indeed, the most prevalent response indicated for this type of incident was to restrict access by modifying privacy settings (see Table 18).

In line with the findings of both Study 4 and Root and McKay (2014), around half of the sample of young adults interviewed reported being both aware and concerned about the possibility of social recruiting prior to organisational entry (Natasha: "*Before I started applying I went back through everything and I consciously made a decision to completely get rid of anything that could even be portrayed in a slightly unfavourable light"*), whilst around a quarter were aware but unconcerned (Kirsten: *"I always knew that someone would probably Google you if you got to the final stages to see if anything horrific comes up. Given that my surname is* [common] *I wasn't too worried they'd find me."*), and the remaining quarter relatively unaware that employers would even be

interested (Nicholas: "*It's not really something I ever considered and I guess it feels as though it's something I should have.*").

However, the largest number of incidents about connecting with professional others was recalled in relation to the period shortly following organisational entry. As a phase characterised by extensive socialisation and adjustment to the organisation (Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Wanous, 1977), social media appeared to play a central role in consolidating the formation of new relationships with colleagues and peers. Nevertheless, almost all interviewees described adopting a common approach to managing their personal-professional boundaries upon social media, in which they were comfortable with accepting fellow graduate trainees into their Facebook networks. As explained by Nicholas, a trainee within retail,

> "*I guess it's kind of like a Venn diagram. You've got colleagues, friends, and then I guess people on the graduate scheme who would fall into that intersection. If someone doesn't fit within that, I wouldn't* [friend them]."

In contrast, for incidents where Facebook friendship requests were received from professional colleagues outside of the graduate schemes, most interviewees reported accepting requests from colleagues with whom they no longer directly worked, but avoiding or declining connections with current colleagues. Despite the apparent clarity of these boundary management strategies, a number of incidents illustrated how the complexity of social relationships presented significant challenges for their effectiveness. For instance, Karen, an intern in retail, described an incident in which she felt pressured to accept a Facebook friend request from a current colleague with whom she got on well. After reluctantly doing so, Karen received notifications that her colleague had liked a number of photos in which she appeared drunk, leading her to reflect that, "*I thought I'd never accept someone, but I am really*

close friends with her and it's making her sound like she's going to go looking through it and I don't think she would. It's just scary to me."

For a small number of interviewees, incidents were recalled in which the perceived pressure to connect with other professionals was so great that it led to them to completely delete or deactivate their social media profile, rather than just amend specific aspects of content. For instance, Anne, a trainee in higher education, discussed how she decided to delete her Twitter and blogging profiles prior to organisational entry because she felt that were an employer to discover her digital presence, the content upon them would no longer be relevant to her identity. Given the central role of social media in the lives of young adults, the complete deactivation of a social media account appeared a relatively drastic strategy of digital reputation management, though one that nevertheless appeared logical given the alternative of identifying individual posts within extensive digital footprints. Indeed, as remarked by Heather, "*I have so many photos that I have been tagged in that it would just take me hours, and I have tried to do it before but it's quite a long process to de-tag yourself in every single photo. I just can't be bothered."*

8.3.4 Category IV: Use of Social Media for Work Purposes

Representing just over one-tenth of the total number of critical incidents (15, 13%), and reported by half of the interviewees (50%), another factor that lead the graduates and trainees to consider professional risk on social media was the use of social media for work purposes. Specifically, all incidents within this category related to either the use of LinkedIn or Twitter. In particular, a number of interviewees recalled incidents in which their use of Twitter on behalf of their employer had conflicted with their reputation amongst friends. For instance, Heather recalled being asked by her employer to post a series of upbeat tweets accompanied with a hashtag designated by the organisation. Doing so subsequently led her to consider how her digital identity had changed following organisational entry, noting that, *"perhaps it's just that transition into wanting to*

be more of a professional than the coolest kid in the playground. That's what I'm kind of going towards now."

A number of interviewees also described using social media as a means for interacting with colleagues and other professionals about work-related issues. For Sara, Twitter presented an opportunity for "*breaking down boundaries*" and interacting with professionals who would otherwise be difficult to access in the offline world ("*I've had discussions with Chief Execs who I'd be really scared to even go and meet with in real life. On Twitter everyone's on level-pegging."*). Indeed, in one specific incident, Sara described tweeting constructive criticism about a set of recently released national health guidelines, which was subsequently found by a Chief Executive within her organisation and led to being offered the opportunity to attend an interview for an upcoming vacancy. Reflecting on the outcome, Sara acknowledged, *"I suppose if I'd never tweeted that comment, I would have never shown on their radar."*

This point was further illustrated by Carl, a trainee in higher education who had identified an opportunity to raise his profile with a senior manager by posting a critical response to one of his blog posts. Despite going against the advice of his partner, who indicated that she felt "*it was a foolish risk to take and didn't understand why I chose to do it*", the post was met with a "*perfectly courteous response*" from the manager and indeed, was considered by Carl to have produced a "net benefit" for his professional reputation. Specifically, he described his decision making as thus: *"I am making my name more known, in return for taking this risk of making my name more known for being an idiot. As it is, I don't think I got the idiot part but I got my name more known."* Indeed, the most prevalent response to incidents that related to the use of social media for work purposes was an increased awareness of professional opportunity (see Table 18).

8.3.5 Category V: Others' Risky Actions Impacting on Self

Representing only 5% of the total number of critical incidents, and reported by one-fifth of the interviewees, another factor that lead the graduates and trainees to consider professional risk on social media was the personal impact of other social media users' actions. The majority of these incidents related to the use of Facebook, and in particular, the tagging functionality. For instance, Jo, a trainee in the health service, described a particular incident that had arisen from her socialisation with fellow graduate trainees outside of working hours, and where photos had been uploaded of her drinking. Subsequently, she described how "*the next morning you're having to delete and un-tag yourself and things*", concluding that *"it's always difficult as well when different people have different boundaries."*

Nevertheless, most interviewees appeared to manage the professional risk presented by others by carefully selecting their Facebook networks on the basis of offline friendship and trust, thus limiting the potential for damaging situations (Emma: "*If you're on a night out and someone takes a picture, then I catch it so* [my friends] *don't put it on Facebook. I guess I just have nice friends really*."). However, a small number of interviewees also emphasised the effectiveness of Facebook's 'Timeline Review' function in creating a "buffer" between being tagged and the content being displayed to others. As acknowledged by James, this offered a reasonable solution to some of the issues associated with this particular category of critical incident, noting, "*Facebook has been quite good now that you've got a setting that allows you to pre-screen everything before it goes in a Timeline. That sort of dealt with that problem."*

8.3.6 Category VI: Re-Establishing Social Connections

The sixth, and final, category of critical incident identified related to just 2 of the 114 total incidents. However, the category still merits a brief discussion in that it highlights why complete withdrawal from social media amongst some young adults appears to represent only a short-term solution to the longer-term

challenge of managing professional risk. In particular, Heather described managing the potential threat of social recruiting by deactivating her Facebook profile whilst searching and applying for positions. Though she considered this strategy to be effective in that she was successfully appointed to her internship program, she soon reactivated her Facebook profile after losing her phone and needing to use the site to reconnect to lost contacts. By Heather's own admission, she had "*missed Facebook a little bit*".

Given that the internship program Heather was employed upon meant that she was continuously entering new roles with new colleagues and managers, profile deactivation appeared to function effectively as a short-term strategy prior to entering the organisation, but not once within it as she formed connections with colleagues and her old content was accessible once again. This incident underlined the pervasiveness of social media, and especially Facebook, in structuring offline social relationships in the digital age. Whilst a minor higher-level category in comparison to the others previously outlined, it provides a stark reminder of how Facebook is unlikely to slip to the periphery of social interactions amongst young adults in the near future, regardless of reports indicating its diminishing popularity with members of the demographic (e.g. Matthews, 2014).

8.3.7 Utility of Digital Reputation Management Systems

Although a range of digital reputation management systems (DRMSs) has been developed in recent years (Persona, 2015; Reppler, 2011; Secure.Me, 2015; SimpleWash, 2015), not one of the young adults interviewed in the current study had used or heard of the sites previously. Thematic analysis of interviewee experiences in using the DRMSs of Reppler and Persona indicated two key themes. First, almost all interviewees emphasised the lack of accuracy with which the systems identified content purporting to pose a risk to professional reputation. Specifically, the DRMSs either failed to detect any risky posts at all, or frequently flagged irrelevant or spurious content in relation to categories of

professional risk that were identified in studies of social recruiting and professionally inappropriate online behaviour (e.g. Karl et al., 2010; Root & McKay, 2014).

For instance, Reppler and Persona frequently presented users with inaccurate warnings of professional risk relating to profanity (James: *"I've got another one which is a post by a friend for profanity and he says, 'Damn. Happy belated birthday'.* [Laughs] *So pretty strong language there.")*, and references to violence (Karen: "*Violence because I wrote the word 'dead' - I was 'on the sofa dead to the world'*"), adult content (James: "*I've got a post from a friend on my wall on Facebook saying happy birthday with three kisses in the form of xxx"*), and drugs and alcohol (Kristy: *"Drugs and alcohol: 'who is up for a joint project in Webex?'* [laughs] *No."*). Nevertheless, on a small number of occasions, the detection algorithms on Reppler and Persona did appear to detect cases of profanity or references to alcohol use that the interviewees considered to be professionally risky.

For instance, Sara noted that Persona had accurately detected a risky post relating to alcohol on her Twitter profile (*"I have put something which I'm pretty certain I put on when I was drunk…").* Whilst admitting that she would "*probably delete it*" as a result, the majority of content flagged by Persona and Reppler as posing a professional risk was left without further action by the interviewees. For instance, Taylor noted that her use of Persona flagged up a number of instances of profanity on her Twitter profile. However, this did not appear to align with her own perceptions of risky behaviour: "*It's highlighting 'twat'. Twat - profanity? Yeah it is, but I don't really care … like, the profanities written aren't really-, I haven't used the C-word on there".* Similarly, Corinne described a tweet that had been flagged by Reppler in which she had posted to her housemates, "*Please have the gin ready when I get home*", though she noted, "*I don't really think that's the worst thing in the world. I think most people are probably having a drink on a Friday night."*

For many of the interviewees, examples such as these underscored the importance of context and personal interpretation in judging the professional riskiness of content, and that this was something that the DRMSs were typically poor in determining. In seeking to address this issue, one recurring suggestion amongst the young adults interviewed was for future iterations of DRMSs to offer a greater degree of personalisation, whereby users would be able to set their own parameters of risk for the system's algorithm to detect. This was identified as being a particularly practical solution for addressing the problem of being alerted to multiple spurious notifications, which appeared only to frustrate and generate distrust in the system. As noted by Markus during his use of Reppler, "*I'm not really too sure if this is accurate or not really. I'm not sure if I trust it.*"

The second theme identified in the thematic analysis of responses to using the DRMSs related to the perceived lack of transparency in how risky content was identified by the systems. Indeed, interviewees identified a small number of features across both systems that were consistently identified as being useful, including the "common words" and "people" features of Reppler and Persona, respectively. In both cases, the functions appeared clear: the former presenting a graphical illustration of the words used commonly in the user's posts (Emma: "*Oh! That's cool. When you press on the words it goes to all the times you've used those words!*"), and the latter showing a summary of people who had posted potentially risky content (Natasha: "*I like the way that it's got 'people'. So you can see who may or may not be favourable."*).

In contrast, however, Reppler's 'Image Score' feature was widely criticised on the basis that the information presented not only appeared to be relatively arbitrary, but also unclear as to its underlying meaning. Representing a perspective conveyed by a number of the interviewees, Markus noted how the feature, in which users were ascribed a "score" out of 100, made a number of assumptions with regards to the user's understanding ("*Anyone can just pluck a*

number out and it's like, 'Great. You've given me eighty-two.' What eighty-two is out of I don't even know. I presume a hundred?"). Similarly, most interviewees also indicated that the "photos" feature of Persona was unclear in how it purportedly detected risky images (Markus: *"It says photos, but what does it scan for photos? Is it captions of photos, or is it photos it scans? I don't really know."*).

Despite the criticisms of the two systems, however, many of the interviewees expressed a feeling of satisfaction in receiving high Reppler image scores (Natasha: *"Of course if it's high, then you're pleasantly surprised, as am I."*) and feedback indicating only a small number of posts flagged by the system as being risky *(*Emma: *"I'm feeling quite proud of myself actually* [laughs] *It's quite satisfying!").* One potentially important implication was the subsequent sense of confidence that some interviewees discussed in relation to the systems retrieving little evidence of risky behaviour. As remarked by Heather, *"I suppose it's quite reassuring because it's not showing me anything too bad."* Similarly, Natasha concluded that the lack of risky content identified in her use of the systems may have been a reflection of her previous attempts at "cleaning" her profiles, noting, "*It's actually made me quite happy because I kind of think, well if it's not really picking up anything, I obviously did a good job of going back through everything."*

This trend was unexpected given that the majority of the interviewees simultaneously acknowledged the lack of reliability in the systems to accurately detect professionally risky content or photos on their profiles. Therefore, on the one hand, interviewees seemed to be aware that the systems typically presented either "misses", where no risk was flagged but it was felt that it perhaps should have (James: "*quite interesting that it doesn't find anything on Twitter…*"), or "false alarms", where posts were flagged as being risky when they clearly were not (Carl: *"I've got pro-violence because I've said Tony Benn has died. Died. Really?"*), whilst on the other, a lack of posts flagged by the system was often

taken to reinforce the interviewees' perceived success in managing professional risk upon their social media profiles.

The implication, therefore, appears to be that in a similar sense to relying on privacy settings as a primary form of digital reputation management, DRMSs may help to reinforce a false sense of security amongst users with regards to perceptions of risk on social media. Specifically, content that actually poses a professional risk may be missed on the basis that it is not flagged by the system. Nevertheless, despite many of the young adults interviewed describing the DRMSs as an interesting approach to managing professional risk on social media, most indicated that at most, they would tend to use them on an infrequent basis (Markus: "*I'd see it more as a spring-cleaning tool"*; Kristy: "*I might be doing it on a monthly basis from now on*"), though more commonly, not at all after the first time (Satveer: "*I guess I will probably never use them again because I'm reassured now having used them once"*).

8.4 DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study raise a number of points with respect to how risk to professional reputation became a salient concern for young adults using social media during the phase of organisational entry. With regards to the first question (**RQ$_{5a}$**), six types of incident were identified as having led interviewees to consider professional risk online, with four reported by half or more of the sample. Amongst the most prevalent were incidents in which the perception of risk had resulted from the interviewee's own interactions with social media, reflecting Sleeper *et al's* (2013) finding of "self-realization" as the main form of awareness for regretful posting on Twitter. In line with the findings of Study 2 (see Chapter 5, Section 5.3.2), professional risk was attributed particularly to the expression of potentially divisive personal views and work-related criticism, though seemingly more in terms of their potential for generating prolonged and visible online debate, rather than their content, per se.

Equally as prevalent were incidents where perceptions of professional risk had been influenced by external sources. One particularly common incident reflected advice provided by parents, whose own experiences of social media being used in the workplace provided guidance on how to behave in a professionally appropriate manner online. Indeed, a range of studies have emphasised the important role of parents in educating their adolescent children about Internet safety (e.g. Council on Communications Media, 2013; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011), and the current findings further supported this. Additionally, the role of university careers services in providing guidance was highlighted, reflecting the growing number of UK-based universities offering comprehensive online guidance and resources for prospective graduates, such as the University of Derby (Longridge, Hooley, & Staunton, 2013).

Remaining within the same category of critical incident, interviewees were also prompted to consider risk to their professional reputation by reading articles in the mainstream press, listening to anecdotes from others, and directly observing incidents where others had encountered negative professional consequences from their social media use. The majority of incidents recalled tended to feature protagonists who shared aspects of professional similarity with the interviewees. One possible interpretation offered relates to the social dimension of psychological distance proposed by Liberman et al. (2007), where perceived familiarity or social similarity with another person or group is related to the level at which they are construed, which, as Study 4 demonstrated, is linked to perceptions of risk with more proximal psychological distances predicting greater perceptions of risk (e.g. Chandran & Menon, 2004; Fischhoff et al., 2003; Spence et al., 2012).

Many interviewees also recalled incidents in which they had been led to consider professional risk as a result of connections with other professionals. Most notably, almost all of the young adults interviewed restricted their Facebook profiles to friends only, though making a distinction by accepting

requests from colleagues upon their graduate scheme, but not others from within their organisation. Reflecting both the psychological need to maintain boundaries between distinct social spheres (Binder et al., 2009) and an awareness of the professional risk associated with context collapse on social media (Marwick & boyd, 2011a), this relatively rigid approach appeared less effective in situations where offline friendships with colleagues had developed. Prior to organisational entry, the young adults also appeared largely aware that prospective employers would be looking at the social media profiles of applicants, thus reflecting the findings of Study 4 and related research (Root & McKay, 2014; Vicknair et al., 2010).

Reflecting the seemingly paradoxical relationship between reputational risk and reward demonstrated in the findings of Studies 1 and 2, many interviewees also recalled incidents in which using social media for work purposes had led them to consider not only the potentially negative consequences of their actions, but also the professional opportunities. In particular, many interviewees described Twitter as presenting a range of tangible opportunities for networking and building professional reputation. In relation to the second research question (**RQ$_{5b}$**), therefore, responses to the critical incidents identified in this study indicated that young adults demonstrated often complex and multi-faceted approaches to managing their professional reputation upon social media.

Specifically, the modification or deletion of content was reported as a particularly common strategy upon Facebook and in response to incidents where the perception of professional risk had resulted from the actions of the young adults themselves. For a relatively small number of interviewees, complete deletion or deactivation of their social media profiles was adopted as an alternative strategy to having to search back through years of content in order to identify professionally risky behaviours. Whilst representing a novel approach to coping with expansive digital footprints and the reputational risk

posed by the persistence of data upon social media (e.g. Mayer-Schönberger, 2009; Solove, 2007), this nevertheless appeared to be a relatively ineffective long-term strategy, with almost all of the young adults reinstating their 'risky' profiles once the perceived immediacy of the threat had diminished.

In contrast, numerous interviewees described doing nothing in response to risky content posted on Twitter, ostensibly to avoid attracting greater attention to their online transgression. This phenomenon has been colloquially termed "the Streisand Effect" (e.g. Cacciottolo, 2012) after entertainer Barbara Streisand's failed attempt in 2003 to suppress photographs of her home being released, which only served to make the information even more widespread. In contrast, incidents involving external influences of risk perception and connecting with other professionals typically led to the modification of privacy settings, and in particular, the "locking down" of privacy settings on Facebook over self-regulating the content itself. Indeed, this trend was also reflected by Tufekci (2008), who found that young adult users would typically set restrictive privacy controls upon Facebook, but pay less attention to restricting information shared within their profile and considering future audiences.

With regards to the third research question (**RQ_{5c}**), the experiences conveyed by interviewees in using the digital reputation management systems (DRMSs) of Reppler and Persona provided an intriguing illustration of confirmation bias, in which people interpret information in ways that confirm their own beliefs (e.g. Nickerson, 1998). Specifically, on the one hand, both DRMSs were discussed as being flawed in terms of their accuracy in identifying professionally risky content, yet on the other, indications of little or no risky content being found appeared to generate feelings of confidence amongst the interviewees that their previous strategies of risk management had been effective. In other words, despite being presented with evidence demonstrating the lack of reliability in the systems, many interviewees seemingly wanted to

think of their own strategies as being effective and thus, interpreted the information accordingly.

The incidents recalled by young adults within the current chapter also provided novel insights into the specific points at which they appeared to be most salient during the organisational entry process. In particular, external influencers of professional risk, such as the advice provided by parents or careers services, appeared to be particularly prominent prior to entry, and seemed to primary involve guidance around responding to the practice of social recruiting. Following organisational entry, the initial phase of organisational socialisation and adaptation (e.g. Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003) appeared to be associated with a number of incidents in which perceptions of professional risk arose from connecting with other professionals upon social media. In particular, most interviewees reported being faced with managing connection requests from colleagues, and in some cases, sensing the social pressure to accept despite feeling uncomfortable about mixing personal and professional domains online (e.g. Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

8.5 CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrated a variety of factors that led young adults upon graduate schemes and year-in-industry internships to consider risk to their professional reputation whilst using social media during the college-to-work transition. Incidents recalled not only reflected the core role of vigilance to one's own potentially risky behaviours, but also the influence of others in raising awareness of professional risk. In particular, parents, university careers services, and even the mainstream press, all appeared to exert an influence on individuals faced with managing extensive digital footprints, often spread across multiple social media platforms. Following organisational entry, young adults reported implementing clearly defined strategies of personal-professional boundary management in response to online connection requests

from colleagues, all the while considering not only the potentially damaging professional consequences of their online actions, but the possible opportunities also.

As such, the findings underlined not only a seemingly high level of awareness amongst young adults of the professional risk associated with social media use, but also familiarity with complex digital reputation management strategies required to control it. For instance, the deletion and deactivation of entire social media profiles whilst applying for jobs portrayed a stark illustration of both the reputational risk posed by the persistence and visibility of digital data upon social media, and seemingly the increasing awareness and acceptance of social recruiting as part of the application process. Indeed, as indicated by the findings of Study 4, employer surveillance upon Facebook appears to be salient enough of an issue for job-seeking students that when it is construed as occurring soon or being likely to happen, perceptions of professional risk are greater.

On a conceptual level, digital reputation management systems (DRMSs) represent a great deal of potential by aiming to help young adults to quickly identify and act upon both recent and older content that could pose a risk to their professional reputation. However, this study found that in terms of implementation, a core issue with both Reppler and Persona was that the algorithms used to detect "risky" content tended to be inaccurate, limited by their lack of capability to successfully evaluate context and intended meaning around posts. Additionally, DRMSs primarily seek to assist users by identifying content that has already been published online, but as indicated by the findings of Studies 3 and 4, careful self-regulation and the construal of professional audience prior to posting also play key roles in digital reputation management. The following part of this thesis now integrates the findings of the five empirical studies within a discussion that also outlines the main contributions of the thesis, and draws some final conclusions.

PART IV

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

9

DISCUSSION

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis has examined why young adults appear to engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media, despite seemingly being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences of doing so.

With social media playing an increasingly prominent role in the professional as well as personal lives of young adults, the empirical studies presented in this thesis aimed to build upon recent work investigating the psychological, behavioural, and economic consequences of the two distinct audiences being co-located within the same online spaces. Drawing from social psychological interpretations of identity, self-presentation, and reputation management as the guiding theoretical framework, the studies aimed to identify factors influencing how young adults perceive and manage professionally risky behaviour when using social media whilst approaching the college-to-work transition.

The empirical studies aimed to address a range of potential factors derived from the literature as to why young adults might engage in professionally risky behaviour on social media. These included a lack awareness of the professional norms and expectations underpinning appropriate online behaviour, limited reputation management skills in managing professional risk, dispositions towards personality traits associated with risky online behaviour, and a perceived lack of presence in relation to professional audience. The respective levels of support found for each of the propositions are discussed in the following section of this chapter.

Though recent studies have started to examine professional risk in the context of social media, many base their measures on the findings of industry-based studies of social recruiting, where the methodologies have tended to be unclear and the validity of the constructs untested (e.g. Karl et al., 2010; Peluchette & Karl, 2008; Root & McKay, 2014). Therefore, a core aim of Study 1 in this thesis was to examine the assumptions underpinning professional risk from an organisational perspective. Specifically, an analysis of social media policy documents was conducted, with the aim of identifying types of employee attributes that organisations expect to be important for the effective management of professional risk on social media.

Similarly, with limited research examining professionally risky behaviour from the perspective of current employees, Study 2 aimed to understand how academic and administrative staff employed within a single university perceived and managed risk to their professional reputation whilst using social media to support professional activity. Though neither Study 1 nor 2 directly addressed the use of social media by young adults, their respective analyses of professionally risky behaviour and the potential factors influencing its expression helped to develop a conceptual framework for examining professionally risky behaviour throughout the remaining three empirical studies.

With Studies 1 and 2 highlighting the potential role of personality in influencing professionally risky use of social media, Study 3 aimed to assess whether individual differences in conscientiousness, agreeableness, self-monitoring, impulsiveness and neuroticism predicted greater consideration of professional risk amongst students using Facebook and Twitter. Based on the mixed findings of studies using self-report personality measures to predict online behaviours (e.g. C. Ross et al., 2009), the study also aimed to address the role of more context-specific approaches to self-regulating social media use. Finally, Study 3 aimed to examine the role of temporal distance to graduation,

with students closer to the college-to-work transition predicted to consider professional risk more frequently on the basis of perceiving professional audience to be more salient than those earlier in their studies.

Building on the core findings of Study 3 and research suggesting a potential role of active job-seeking in the development of concern for online professional image (e.g. R. Miller et al., 2012), Study 4 aimed to assess whether intentions to start actively applying for jobs influenced how final-year undergraduate students perceived professional risk on Facebook. Reflecting an alternative hypothesis raised by the findings of Study 3, the study also aimed to examine whether a more proximal psychological distance of prospective employers on Facebook would predict increased perceptions of professional risk on the site. Finally, Study 4 aimed to assess whether the perception of Facebook as a "safe" space for self-presentation could be explained through the potential relationship between psychological distance of professional audience and trust in privacy settings to block the access of unwanted audiences.

With psychological distance of professional audience found to influence perceptions of professional risk on Facebook, Study 5 aimed to identify the types of incidents that lead young adults to consider risk to their professional reputation whilst using social media during the college-to-work transition. The second aim of the study was to identify the types of reputation management strategies subsequently used to address these incidents. The third and final aim of Study 5 was to evaluate the utility of the information presented by two digital reputation management systems (DRMSs), Reppler and Persona, which aim to help young adults to identify and manage professional risky behaviour on social media. The core findings of these empirical studies are now discussed in the following section.

9.2 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Social norms represent a shared understanding of the rules or standards that guide and constrain behaviour within a group, and as such, play an important role in determining behaviour in specific social situations and the expression of particular social identities (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Turner et al., 1987). As organisational use of social media has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, employers have sought to control the online conduct of their employees in order to limit the risk of reputational damage (e.g. Wollan et al., 2011). However, in doing so, the social norms underpinning "appropriate" online behaviour have shifted to reflect professional standards, with instances of deviation representing what has been referred to throughout this thesis as "professionally risky behaviour".

As a relatively novel phenomenon, the extent to which these professional norms have been examined in a methodologically rigorous manner has been relatively limited. Nevertheless, clarifying professional expectations of appropriate and inappropriate online behaviour is crucial to understanding professional risk in the context of social media, and indeed, examining the ways in which young adults perceive and manage its expression whilst using the technology. Therefore, rather than relying on the untested assumptions of prior research, Studies 1 and 2 of this thesis sought to ground the concept in the perspectives of both organisations and current employees. This discussion turns first to the findings of these empirical studies, and how they provided a conceptual framework of professional risk, and the mental and behavioural strategies used in its management.

Study 1 involved a thematic analysis of thirty organisational social media policy documents. This specific approach was adopted because policy documents instantiate organisational expectations of "professionally appropriate" online behaviour, and therefore convey the types of attributes that young adults may need to exhibit in their use of social media in order to

maintain employability. The analysis indicated two broad types of attributes expected of employees: first, knowledge and skills, and second, personality and character. With respect to the first theme, the policies emphasised the need for employees to be aware of the legal implications of using social media and of other organisational policies outlining the employer's values. Employees were also expected to be skilled in exercising "common sense" professional judgments, communicating in a balanced but authentic style, and literate in terms of the specific challenges posed by the affordances of social media.

With regards to the second theme, the policies outlined expectations of "professionally appropriate" behaviour that were aligned with various personality traits, including conscientiousness, neuroticism, agreeableness, self-monitoring, and impulsiveness. Specifically, the policies outlined the need for employees to closely self-regulate their interactions with the technology, including avoiding explicit criticism of others, suppressing emotionally charged reactions, and avoiding the expression of personal views on potentially controversial or divisive topics, such as religion and politics. Additionally, almost all policies emphasised the importance for employees to demonstrate integrity and engage in polite, non-confrontational forms of online communication.

In emphasising these attributes, the policies revealed a contradiction within their expectations of "professionally appropriate" social media use. On the one hand, they emphasised the need for employees to engage with social media in honest, transparent, and authentic ways, whilst on the other, they underscored the importance of online interactions remaining positive and being closely self-regulated to avoid the risk of damaging the employer's reputation. In summary, employees were expected to behave authentically online, though only if aligned with the employer's interpretation of professionally appropriate use. The disciplinary sanctions for failing to conform to this expectation were communicated with greater clarity by the policies, reflecting the dominant focus of most social media policies upon mitigating risk (Boudreaux, 2011).

Study 2 demonstrated how this contradiction was also prevalent throughout the perceptions and management of professionally risky behaviour by university employees using social media to support their professional activity. In particular, employees perceived professional risk in two consistent forms: first, through the type of content shared online, and second, through connecting with professional others in otherwise social spaces. With respect to the first theme, many of the interviewees associated professional risk on social media with expressions of individuality, such as conveying strong emotions, posting humorous content, sharing personal views on potentially divisive or controversial issues, and criticising their employer or aspects of work. However, many of these behaviours were also identified as playing a role in helping to *build* professional reputation upon social media, thus presenting a potential conflict between the authenticity required for successful personal branding (e.g. Schawbel, 2009) and the behavioural conformity demanded by employers.

In relation to the second theme, employees emphasised the professional risk of connecting with professional peers, colleagues, and students on sites where other distinct social groups would be present. This was identified as being a particularly challenging issue for academic employees using Facebook, who underlined perceived social pressures of accepting peers and colleagues into their network. This reflected the findings of existing research on the tensions created by the co-presence of potentially conflicting social groups or life modes within the same online networks (e.g. Binder et al., 2009; Lampinen et al., 2009; Ozenc & Farnham, 2011; Skeels & Grudin, 2009). In line with the low incidence of student-professor Facebook friendships reported elsewhere (e.g. Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Karl & Peluchette, 2011; Madge et al., 2009), all interviewees reported avoiding this form of connection due to the particularly salient level of professional risk associated with doing so.

Study 2 found that employees adopted two core strategies of managing professional risk that reflected both the behavioural and mental strategies of

managing group co-presence identified by Lampinen et al. (2009), and the content and audience dichotomy outlined by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013). First, employees reported closely self-regulating their use of social media with respect to a "common sense" approach of thinking carefully of potential professional consequences before posting particular types of risky content. Greater variation was noted in whether employees immediately deleted or removed access to risky content already posted online, with some reporting that they would often avoid taking action so to prevent attracting even greater attention and incurring what has been referred to colloquially as the "Streisand Effect" (See Section 8.4: Cacciottolo, 2012).

The study also found that a number of employees discussed relaxing their otherwise strict approaches of self-regulation when using Facebook, still remaining vigilant but opting to disclose more authentic aspects of their identity amongst their network of trusted friends. Indeed, the perception of Facebook as offering a "safer" space for social interaction (e.g. Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008) tied in with the second key strategy adopted to manage professional risk, whereby the site's privacy settings were used to block unwanted audiences and restrict the visibility of online content to friends known within an offline context (e.g. Ellison et al., 2007; Joinson, 2008; Lampe et al., 2006). This contrasted with the predominantly public-facing use of Twitter, where the vigilant self-regulation of online behaviour appeared to take precedence over strategies of boundary management in relation to audience (e.g. Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013).

The findings of these first two empirical studies helped to form a conceptual framework of professional risk, and the mental and behavioural strategies involved in its management (cf. Lampinen et al., 2009). This was used across the three remaining empirical studies to address the core research objective of this thesis in understanding why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour on social media, despite being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. Specifically, four factors were

identified as potentially influencing professionally risky behaviour: first, a lack of awareness of the social norms underpinning "professionally appropriate" behaviour; second, a lack of reputation management skill in managing professional risk; third, dispositions towards personality traits associated with risky online behaviour; and fourth, a perceived lack of presence in relation to professional audience. The discussion now turns to how these factors were addressed by the findings of Studies 3, 4, and 5.

With respect to the first factor, mixed support was found for the proposition that young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour on social media because they lack awareness of professional expectations of "appropriate" behaviour. For instance, Study 3 found that most Sixth Form College and undergraduate students reported avoiding the expression of online behaviours identified as being professionally risky in Studies 1 and 2, such as using social media without prior consideration, using profanity, or venting their frustrations. However, most students also tended not to frequently consider either the beneficial or damaging professional consequences of their interactions, suggesting that whilst they may have been aware of the need to maintain a desirable reputation, this was not specifically for the benefit of a professional audience.

Similarly, Study 4 showed how final-year undergraduate students were typically aware of the professional risk associated with Facebook posts depicting drink and drug use, derogatory remarks, work-related criticism, and to a lesser extent, profanity. In contrast, perceptions of professional risk in relation to spelling and grammar errors were significantly lower, despite consistently being identified by employers as informing negative professional judgments of candidates (e.g. Jobvite, 2013, 2014b). Therefore, whilst young adults appeared to be aware of the professional risk associated with content portraying controversial or antisocial content, risk created through poor communication style appeared to represent a "blind spot". These findings closely mirrored those

of Root and McKay (2014), who similarly reported how the students in their study typically perceived spelling and grammar errors to be unimportant from the perspective of prospective employers.

For the graduate trainees and year-in-industry interns interviewed in Study 5, one of the most prevalent types of incident leading them to consider professional risk on social media related to identifying their own risky behaviour. In particular, a number of incidents involved posting controversial or divisive personal views that subsequently led to prolonged online debates. Reflecting Sleeper et al's (2013) identification of "self-realization" as a key factor influencing awareness of regret amongst Twitter users, the finding suggested that the young adults may have possessed an understanding of professional risk, but that it nevertheless failed in preventing them from expressing the risky behaviour.

One potentially important factor influencing perceptions of professional risk here may be the role of context. As discussed in Chapter 8 (see Section 8.4), a number of potentially risky Facebook and Twitter posts were flagged through the participants' use of Reppler and Persona, but most were dismissed as being problematic on the basis of their rather more benign intended meaning. Though requiring further examination, the study also hinted at how type of profession may also play a salient role in influencing perceptions of professional risk on social media, with participants upon graduate trainee schemes within the public sector seeming to express a particular sensitivity towards the potentially negative consequences of their online actions.

In addition to considering the potential conflict that may arise from the co-presence of personal and professional identities, one alternative theoretical interpretation of these findings is in the form of goal-directed behaviour, as outlined previously in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.2.1). In particular, the process of self-regulation has been positioned as involving the identification of goals in relation to what individuals feel they want, or need to achieve or avoid (Carver &

Scheier, 1990), and that behaviour is subsequently monitored and adapted until these goals are attained (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003). However, goals can of course be multifaceted, and this may indeed be the case for young adults using social media when approaching the point of organisational entry.

Specifically, such an individual may be cognisant of the eventual need to ensure that their social media presence will be judged favourably by potential employers, but a more immediate, competing goal may be to garner positive social feedback from friends and peers online. Of course, the behaviours associated with achieving these goals may not necessarily be in conflict, such as in cases where online social networks value similar behaviours to prospective employers. However, in cases where the goals conflict for young adult users, the primary motivation within the self-regulatory process to reduce discrepancies between current and identified future states (e.g. Carver & Scheier, 1982) may lead to more immediate goals in relation to a social audience of friends being perceived as more salient than to longer terms goals with respect to career prospects and professional audiences online.

With regards to the second factor, limited support was found for the proposition that young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour on social media because they lack sufficient skill in digital reputation management. Study 3 demonstrated that on average, the students reported having used at least one strategy of profile modification on Facebook to avoid damaging their career prospects, with the modification or deletion of content being the most prevalent form. Similarly, Study 5 indicated the prevalence of young adults having deleted risky content on Facebook. However, reflecting the findings of Study 2, some interviewees reported leaving risky posts found on Twitter on the basis that their removal may have attracted unwanted attention. A small number of young adults also reported deactivating their entire profiles in response to the time required to search back through their vast digital footprints, created through the

persistence of data upon social media (e.g. Ellison & boyd, 2013; Mayer-Schönberger, 2009).

With regards to online boundary management, over 90% of the young adults across the third, fourth, and fifth studies reported using Facebook privacy settings to restrict access of unwanted audiences, echoing the findings of related studies (e.g. Madden, 2012; Madden & Smith, 2010). The young adults interviewed in Study 5 also reported using a structured approach to managing their Facebook networks, distinguishing between colleagues on their graduate scheme who they happily connected with, and other colleagues within their organisation, who they tended to avoid accepting as a "Friend" online. Nevertheless, this strategy appeared to be ineffective for handling friend requests from current colleagues who had become friends offline; a tension also reported amongst employees interviewed in studies by Skeels and Grudin (2009) and Stutzman and Hartzog (2012).

The lack of empirical evidence found for the proposition that young adults lack skills in digital reputation management is perhaps unsurprisingly given that most of the "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001) participating in Studies 3, 4, and 5 reported considerable experience in using social media. Specifically, almost all of the young adults sampled across the three studies reported using Facebook. Typically, participants reported around four to six years of experience in using the site, network sizes of between 300 to 500 friends, and most commonly used the platform for around 30 to 60 minutes per day. Though comparatively less prominent, over three-quarters of the young adults involved in both Studies 3 and 5 reported using Twitter, with most possessing between one to three years of experience using the site.

Limited support was also found for the third factor, where it was proposed that young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour on social media because of dispositions towards personality traits associated with risky behaviour. Young adults and adolescents have consistently been found to more

readily engage in risky behaviours than either children or mature adults (Emler & Reicher, 1995; Reyna & Farley, 2006; Steinberg, 2008), and both Steinberg (2007, 2010) and Reyna and Farley (2006) have highlighted the role of risk-seeking and impulsive tendencies in risky decision-making amongst members of this cohort. In one of the few studies to specifically address the relationship between personality and professionally risky behaviour on social media, Karl et al. (2010) found that young adults low in conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability were more likely to report having posted professionally risky Facebook content.

Though Study 3 found significant zero-order correlations between impulsiveness, conscientiousness, and the extent to which students reported considering the professional consequences of their interactions with social media, effect sizes were only small, explaining between only 1.3% and 2.5% of variance, respectively. Furthermore, when entered into a multiple regression model with measures of neuroticism, agreeableness, self-monitoring, and types of self-regulation in social media use, these relationships were no longer statistically significant. Therefore, the study indicated that individual differences in personality did not appear to be a salient factor in explaining the professionally risky behaviour of young adults upon social media. However, it is acknowledged that significant relationships have been found in studies where the online behaviour was observed rather than self-reported (e.g. C. Ross et al., 2009; Seidman, 2013), so further study is required within this area before discounting the possible role of personality.

The fourth factor received the greatest support from the empirical findings, with evidence presented to suggest that young adults may engage in professionally risky online behaviour because of a perceived lack of presence in relation to professional audience. Study 3 found that undergraduates preparing to enter their final year of study considered the professional consequences of their interactions with social media more frequently than those at earlier stages

of study or preparing to graduate at the end of their final year. This finding was interpreted in terms of the proposition that students entering their final year of study would be preparing to apply for jobs and therefore start to consider the online presence of a professional audience more readily, particularly as an increasing number are aware of prospective employers looking at the social media profiles of applicants (Root & McKay, 2014; Vicknair et al., 2010).

It was hypothesised that the construal-level theory of psychological distance (CLT: Liberman & Trope, 1998) presented a potential theoretical explanation of these findings. Specifically, CLT states that when events are construed in terms of their concrete, low-level details, they are experienced as being psychologically closer. In contexts where the event represents a hazard, lower psychological distance has been consistently found to predict increased perceptions of risk (Carvalho et al., 2008; Chandran & Menon, 2004; Spence et al., 2012). Using CLT as a theoretical framework, Study 4 found that the psychological distance of employer surveillance on Facebook significantly predicted ratings of professional risk in relation to posts featuring profanity, derogatory language, work-related criticism, and depictions of alcohol and drug use, though not for those featuring poor grammar and spelling. Specifically, when the presence of professional audience on Facebook was construed as being psychologically closer, ratings of professional risk increased.

This finding represents a key contribution in understanding why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour when using social media, despite being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. Specifically, 90 percent of the students surveyed in Study 4 shared the belief that prospective employers would be searching for their Facebook profiles within the coming year, but it was the psychological distance of this event occurring that influenced perceptions of professional risk. Given the positive relationship found between risk perception and engagement in prevention behaviour (e.g. Brewer et al., 2007; Brewer et al., 2004), the psychological distance of professional audience

online may have important implications for the design of educational and technological interventions aimed at helping young adults to manage professional risk upon social media. These ideas are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Study 4 also indicated a small positive association between trust in Facebook privacy settings to block the access of restricted professional audiences and the psychological distance of employer surveillance upon the site. Though important to temper any firm conclusions being drawn given the small effect size and the lack of causal inference, the relationship may nevertheless explain why the employees interviewed in Study 2 described Facebook as representing their "safe space". Specifically, whilst no direct relationship was found between perceptions of professional risk and trust in privacy settings, it may be that users self-regulate their content less closely upon Facebook when they trust in their privacy settings because of the way in which it makes the surveillance of restricted professional audiences feel a more psychologically distant reality.

One additional factor to emerge from the empirical findings was the paradoxical character of professional risk. Specifically, the findings of Studies 1, 2, and 5 showed how online behaviours interpreted as leading to potentially damaging reputational consequences were also often identified as representing professional opportunities. Whilst discussion of professional risk is inevitably drawn to the threats of reputational damage, risk can also be interpreted as being beneficial (e.g. Giddens, 1999). With this in mind, it could be that young adults engage in professionally risky behaviours as a carefully judged strategy based on the reputational opportunities they present. Indeed, this possibility was illustrated in a small number of incidents identified in Study 5, where graduate trainees discussed evaluating the reputational threats and opportunities of particular online actions prior to posting. The following section now turns to outline the contributions of this thesis.

9.3 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

9.3.1 Theoretical

A key theoretical contribution of this thesis was the application of the construal-level theory of psychological distance (CLT: Liberman & Trope, 1998) as a theoretical framework for understanding why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour on social media, despite being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. In particular, CLT helps to link the interdisciplinary bodies of literature on online self-presentation, digital reputation management, and risk perception by demonstrating how the psychological distance with which social media users imagine a professional audience online influences their perceptions of professional risk and subsequently, the likelihood of them engaging in prevention behaviours.

Although CLT and psychological distance have been used as the basis for studying perceptions of risk and engagement in prevention behaviours across a range of contexts, including health (Carvalho et al., 2008; Chandran & Menon, 2004) and climate change (Spence et al., 2012), the current thesis represents one of the first empirical examinations of the concept in relation to the study of professionally risky behaviour on social media[4]. Similarly, whilst the psychological and behavioural consequences of professional connections occupying the online social networks of users have been examined with respect to their size and level of representation (Binder et al., 2009; Stutzman & Hartzog, 2012), the current thesis contributes to this body of literature by demonstrating how the psychological distance of professional audience is also a relevant factor.

This thesis offers a number of additional theoretical contributions. The findings of Studies 1 and 2 contributed towards the development of a conceptual

[4] As outlined previously, a relationship between concern for professional image and psychological distance was hypothesised by Miller and colleagues (2010; 2012), though not specifically in relation to employer surveillance or examined through empirical investigation.

framework of professional risk, and the mental and behavioural strategies involved in its management by employees. To date, most research studies investigating professional risk on social media have based their measures on the findings of industry-based reports of social recruiting, where the methodologies have tended to be unclear and the assumptions underpinning the constructs untested (e.g. Karl et al., 2010; Peluchette & Karl, 2008; Root & McKay, 2014). By analysing professionally risky behaviour from the perspectives of both organisations (Study 1) and current employees (Studies 2 and 5), this thesis has contributed towards a richer understanding of the concept.

This thesis also contributed theoretically towards a more nuanced understanding of digital reputation management behaviour. Extending the types of mental and behavioural group co-presence strategies outlined by Lampinen et al. (2009), and the various content and audience-related boundary management behaviours identified by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013), Studies 2 and 5 demonstrated how employees used a wide and complex variety of strategies, reflecting consideration of both professionally beneficial and damaging reputational consequences associated with social media use. Furthermore, seemingly irrational or uncommon strategies of digital reputation management were identified and discussed in these studies, such as the decision to leave professionally risky content as publicly accessible rather than deleting it, or opting to deactivate entire social media profiles rather than find specific instances of professionally risky content.

9.3.2 Methodological

The current thesis adopted a pragmatic, mixed methods approach to examining the question of why young adults engage in professionally risky behaviour, despite being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. In instances where robust, validated measures of constructs were available, these were integrated into the methodological approach of the current thesis. For instance, Study 3 used validated, short-form measures of the five factor model

(FFM) personality domains, self-monitoring, and impulsiveness. However, in cases where measures had either not yet been developed or lacked sufficient methodological information regarding their development, new measures were constructed for the purpose of examining the specific research questions posed throughout the thesis. Full details of how these measures were developed are provided within the preceding empirical chapters, although an overview of their contribution is now provided.

Based on the findings of Studies 1 and 2, and following Hinkin's (1998) comprehensive guidelines for scale development, measures of self-regulatory interactions with social media were developed for use in Study 3 (see Chapter 6, Section 6.2.2). Specifically, measures of self-regulatory control (5 items, $\alpha = .77$), prevention of threats to reputation (5 items, $\alpha = .76$) and professional self-promotion (4 items, $\alpha = .69$) indicated acceptable levels of internal consistency (e.g. Nunnally, 1978), and all significantly predicted variance in consideration of professional consequences (4 items, $\alpha = .87$), which demonstrated particularly good internal consistency. Similarly, 4-item measures of profile modification strategies used on Facebook ($\alpha = .77$) and Twitter ($\alpha = .70$) demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability. Though requiring further validation, these scales represent reliable measures for future studies wishing to examine the self-regulation of social media use with respect to professional norms and expectations of "appropriate" behaviour.

Study 4 of the thesis presented two methodological contributions. First, a scale-based measure of psychological distance in relation to employer surveillance on Facebook was developed by adapting items from the multi-dimensional measure of psychological distance developed by Spence et al. (2012) in relation to climate change. Although a multi-factor interpretation representing the unique dimensions of social, temporal, and hypothetical distances was not supported through principle components analysis (PCA), a single factor measure of psychological distance demonstrated acceptable

reliability (5 items, α = .75). Additionally, with most research examining psychological distance through experimental methods in which construal levels are manipulated through priming protocols (e.g. Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope et al., 2007), Study 4 adds to only a small number of studies to have found significant effects of psychological distance when measured through a scale-based method (e.g. Spence et al., 2012).

Second, a number of short vignettes were developed for Study 4, with each representing one of five common forms of professionally risky behaviour identified through the findings of Study 1 and 2, and from a range of industry-based reports of social recruiting (CareerBuilder, 2012; Cross-Tab, 2010; Jobvite, 2014b; Reppler, 2011). Previous studies examining perceptions of professionally risky behaviour on social media had used scale-based measures to ask respondents about the likelihood of them sharing similar posts (Karl et al., 2010) or their perceptions of importance to prospective employers (Root & McKay, 2014). By developing a series of "mock" Facebook posts adapted from real-life cases of professionally risky behaviours, the vignettes used in Study 4 offered more "concrete" representations (Alexander & Becker, 1978) of professional risk for respondents to rate compared to the more abstract measures used previously. The two factors of professional risk produced by PCA, content-based (13 vignettes, α = .88) and style-based (4 vignettes, α = .74), demonstrated good reliability and reflected an almost identical factor structure to a subsequent PCA conducted by Root and McKay (2014) on different, though conceptually similar scale-based items.

In broader terms, the thesis also presented a methodological contribution in terms of its person-centred approach to social media research ethics. This manifested itself in various forms throughout the collection and reporting of data. For instance, all information pertaining to network characteristics were self-reported by participants rather than being mined directly from social media profiles, and any details relating to the content of specific posts were shared

voluntarily by individuals and subsequently reported in ways that would attenuate the possibility of being identified as a result. A particular illustration was observed in the use of the think-aloud protocol (TAP: Ericsson & Simon, 1998) method as the basis for examining the utility of digital reputation management systems (DRMSs) Reppler and Persona in Study 5. Specifically, interviewees voluntarily verbalised content from their social media profiles that had been identified by the systems as being risky, but caution was taken in reporting these within the findings of Chapter 8 (see Section 8.3.7) on the basis that individuals could potentially be identified as a result. Whilst it is not claimed that the studies presented in this thesis are unique in having carefully considered the ethical implications of studying interactions with social media, they do contribute evidence of a methodological approach in which valuable findings could be concluded about a particular cohort of social media users without compromising their right to privacy beyond the research.

9.3.3 Developing Social Media Literacy

As identified in a recent report by the UK Government Office for Science (Foresight Future Identities, 2013, p. 56), digital literacy is expected to become increasingly important for young adults facing the need "*to protect themselves by understanding how personal information online can be cross-referenced and used, and how difficult it is to remove data from the digital environment."* Indeed, the Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc, 2014) propose that a core focus for colleges and universities in the UK needs to be upon "developing digital literacies" of young adults, including the management of "digital reputation and online identity" as part of a broader focus on the impact of social media use on careers.

Digital literacy has become an increasingly pressing concern for children of even younger ages too. In a large-scale study of over 25,000 children aged 9 to 16-years-old and sampled from 25 European countries, Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, and Ólafsson (2011) found that almost three-fifths reported going online

daily and being a member of a social networking site, respectively. Most concerning, however, was that around one-quarter reported leaving their profiles accessible to the public and just over two-fifths had experienced one or more risks that included being exposed to pornography, bullying, sexting, and communicating online with people that they had not previously met offline. Subsequently, UK-based initiatives such as iRights (2016) have emerged in an effort to campaign for better policies that will enable children and young adults to more easily remove or edit personal data, know about the ownership of their data, be protected from illegal practices, make informed and conscious decisions, and access digital knowledge and skills.

Nevertheless, whilst developing digital reputation management skills and awareness of the professional risks associated with using social media is undoubtedly an important element of digital literacy curricula, the findings of this thesis indicate that this is only part of a broader approach given that young adults continue to engage in professionally risky behaviour regardless of an apparent awareness of the potentially damaging reputational consequences. Specifically, the main contribution of the current thesis highlights the effect that psychological distance of professional audience has on perceptions of professional risk online, and subsequently, the likelihood of engaging in preventative behaviours.

The implications of this finding for education are illustrated by Chandran and Menon (2004), who found that when the health risks associated with cell phone radiation were communicated in temporally closer terms (i.e. cases per day vs. per year), perceptions of risk and behavioural intentions to act in a precautionary manner in the future were greater regardless of the difficulty in doing so, whilst the effect held for only easier preventative responses when framed in more distant terms. Based on this finding and others similar to it, such as responding to climate change (Spence et al., 2012), it could be suggested that educational interventions should not only focus on the content of the

information they provide adolescents and young adults, but the framing of it with respect to psychological distance.

Specifically, construal-level theory highlights four dimensions of psychological distance: temporal, spatial, social, and hypothetical. Following directly from this, a key implication of the findings in the current thesis is that when communicating the professional risks of using social media, educators should frame them in terms of requiring attention immediately rather than at a later point, as being relevant to people with similar social characteristics and aspirations as the student rather that others, and as being a highly probable issue rather than an unlikely eventuality. In other words, the current thesis indicates that it may not be enough to simply raise awareness amongst young adults of professional audiences online, but rather, that should educational interventions should focus on framing the risk in concrete, proximal terms that will lead individuals to perceive the professional consequences of their online actions as a more pressing concern, regardless of their actual distance from graduating or entering the workplace.

An important caveat to this, however, is that educating young adults about the professional risk associated with poor spelling and grammar should focus more on raising awareness than framing per se, given that Study 4 found no significant relationship with psychological distance for ratings of this form of professional risk. Indeed, communication style was identified as a potential "blind spot" for professional risk amongst young adults, both in the findings of the current thesis and in the previously discussed study by Root and McKay (2014). With professional audiences needing to be imagined rather than directly encountered online for many students distant from graduation, this form of professional risk may pose a particular threat as "text speak", slang terms, and memes continue to be used to interact amongst peers regardless of self-regulating the expression of potentially risky content (e.g. boyd, 2014; Drouin & Davis, 2009).

As illustrated by the findings of Study 5, college and university careers services appear to play an important role in providing advice to students about the need to utilise their privacy settings and consider professional audience when posting online. Additionally, parents also appear to exert an influence on the behaviour of their young adult children, providing advice based on their own experiences of using social media within the workplace. In a similar respect, Livingstone et al. (2011) found that 70 percent of adults reported having spoken to their 9 – 16-years-old children about their use of the Internet, though according to the children surveyed, almost one in eight parents had not engaged in any forms of mediation whereas almost three-quarters indicated that their teachers had and that their peers had helped inform their Internet use in a positive sense.

Indeed, whilst the current thesis has focused primarily upon perceptions of professional risk amongst young adult users of social media, it is also appropriate to consider how the implications of these findings may extrapolate to younger adolescents. Specifically, the preceding discussion of psychological distance has indicated that framing the presence of professional audience online in more concrete, proximal terms may be beneficial as part of an educational intervention for influencing a greater likelihood of engaging in risk prevention behaviours when using social media. However, significant questions remain with respect to the practical feasibility and broader desirability of adopting such an approach with children and young adolescents. Aside from the likely contention of whether doing so would hold any significant social meaning for members of such a young demographic, focusing any kind of intervention on the negative reinforcement inherent to organisational surveillance may have longer term implications for the character of social media and the latitude in offers in the production of digital selves.

As outlined previously in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.5), Erikson (1959) emphasised the important role of the "moratorium", or "free role

experimentation" status in adolescence, where distinct social identities could be trialled without yet requiring a firm commitment on the part of the individual. With social media identified as playing a potentially important role in enabling adolescents to engage in such identity play (e.g. boyd, 2007; boyd & Ellison, 2007; Livingstone, 2008; Wilson et al., 2012), emphasising the need for members of this cohort to internalise and comply with specific, organisationally sanctioned forms of online behaviour seems likely to not only significantly restrict any form of moratorium phase but also serve to redefine the range of valid digital identities available to future generations.

Additionally, this thesis indicated that whilst the most evident form of intervention for young adults may be to help identify and seek to prevent the types of online behaviour likely to damage their professional reputation, it is also important to acknowledge that such actions may also have career-defining benefits. As illustrated in the experiences relayed by employees in both Studies 2 and 5, professionally risky behaviours such as using sarcastic humour and expressing critical views in public spaces online also led to otherwise unforeseen professional opportunities. In this sense, the thesis underscores the need to avoid dogmatic "do's and don'ts" guidelines of social media use, and instead focus on how to help young adults to engage in informed judgments relating to the potential professional benefits of an online action, weighed against the possible costs to reputation. Thus, older adults possessing considerable professional experience prior to using social media, such as those interviewed within Study 2, may come to play an important role in helping younger professionals to both judge and manage reputational risks online.

9.3.4 Designing Digital Reputation Management Systems

In recent years, a number of online tools have been developed with the common aim of helping users to identify potentially risky content upon their social media profiles by linking to these accounts and primarily applying algorithms that scan text for "inappropriate" words and phrases. In the absence of a pre-assigned

descriptor for these sites, this thesis refers to them collectively as digital reputation management systems (DRMSs), with illustrations provided by Reppler (2015), Persona (2015), Secure.Me (2015), and SimpleWash (2015). However, despite many of these systems being freely available, none of the young adults interviewed in Study 5 reported having heard of or used them prior to the study. Additionally, Kawase et al. (2013) demonstrated through their "FireMe!" application on Twitter that even when presented with evidence of professionally risky behaviour and the means to easily remove it from public access, many users opt not to.

Additionally, many of the interviewees in Study 5 of this thesis noted the lack of reliability in the information provided by both Reppler and Persona, whilst simultaneously interpreting the lack of professionally risky content flagged as proof of otherwise effective strategies of digital reputation management. Therefore, whilst seemingly well intentioned, DRMSs arguably have a responsibility to either improve their algorithms to more accurately detect professionally risky content on the social media profiles of users, or at least be more explicit about the limitations of their service so not to induce a false sense of security when no risky content is presented. Of the two approaches, the first would appear to be the most preferable; not least because some of the features discussed by young adults in Study 5 appeared to be useful, such as commonly used words and the identification of connected others posting risky content. Though Reppler's attempts to "gamify" the experience by providing an "Image Score" was widely criticised on the basis of its opaque and seemingly arbitrary nature, seeking a high score nevertheless appeared to resonate with users as a motivational concept.

By adopting a similar approach to textual analysis as linguists interested in analysing big data sets (e.g. LIWC: Pennebaker & Francis, 1999), DRMSs are subject to similar criticisms with respect to being able to detect idiosyncratic and free-form expressions of professionally risky content on social media (e.g.

Baldwin, 2012). A key implication for system design emphasised through the experiences of interviewees in Study 5 was therefore for social context to be determined more readily. Specifically, interviewees indicated the desire for a feature that could be personalised by the user to avoid certain words or phrases if they were consistently being inaccurately flagged as "risky" by the system, or simply deemed to be too low in risk to raise concern. However, enabling users to adapt a system's detection rules to their own interpretations of professional risk may in itself be a potentially risky endeavour, particularly given the finding of Study 4 that young adults underestimated the riskiness of communication style on social media. Nevertheless, the design of systems should reflect the conceptual models of their users as closely as possible (e.g. Norman, 1999, 2002), and this same principle may also be extended to how DRMSs detect and represent professionally risky content found upon the social media profiles of its users.

Nevertheless, an inherent limitation of DRMSs is that their primary objective is to help users to identify professionally risky content *after* it has already been posted online, and therefore potentially already been viewed by prospective or current employers. Given the emphasis placed upon careful self-regulation and consideration of professional consequences throughout the empirical findings of this thesis, an alternative implication for system design is to focus on preventing the expression of potentially risky content before it has been published on social media. Though relatively rudimentary, an early illustration is Google's "Mail Goggles" application (Perlow, 2008), which was developed with the aim of preventing Gmail users from sending emails that they might later regret. Specifically, users could define a time period in which the system would present them with a series of mathematical problems to solve upon selecting "send", and that would disable the function if answered incorrectly.

Adopting a more advanced approach, the "Starshell" system recently launched by Kudos Knowledge (2015) is an application that monitors outgoing social media posts and alerts users to potential professional risk before the content is even published, presenting information about why particular content has been flagged and details of applicable school or employer social media guidelines. At present, there is little indication as to how effective this form of pre-emptive intervention may be, although the findings of this thesis emphasise the importance not only of building knowledge of professionally risky behaviour, but also of increasing the perceived presence of professional audience amongst young adults using social media. One way in which this may be used effectively would be to combine it with a form of broadcast delay, as illustrated by Buffer (2015); a system in which users are able to "schedule" future posts across different platforms. Specifically, a system could be designed to introduce a short delay between the creation and publication of content by users, and use this "cooling off" period to not only provide feedback on the potential risk of the content submitted, but also prime a closer psychological distance of professional audience online through, for instance, the provision of specific and socially relevant statistics relating to social recruiting and employer surveillance.

9.4 LIMITATIONS

A number of limitations are noted in relation to the empirical research conducted in this thesis. The first concerns the representativeness of the samples used for examining the principal research question, and subsequently, the generalisability of the findings to young adults using social media. In particular, Studies 3 and 4 sampled current students based predominantly at the University of Nottingham and similar Russell Group universities in the UK, while Study 5 sampled students on year-in-industry internship programmes and recent graduates on trainee schemes.

It is important to consider the limitations of generalising the findings from these sub-groups to young adults in general. In particular, students from top-tier institutions may be afforded with higher quality resources and greater employment opportunities following graduation than their peers at lower ranking institutions, which may in turn influence differences in the perception of professional risk when using social media. Furthermore, whilst many young adults opt to progress from further to higher education in the UK, not all do (e.g. Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2015), and a non-student population of young adults may also perceive professional risk quite differently to those within full-time study.

Nevertheless, the high prevalence of social media use and variability in how students and recent graduates sampled throughout this thesis conveyed perceptions of professional risk indicated that this particular subset of young adults was neither homogenous nor lacking in relevance to the principal research question. Additionally, the network characteristics reported for the samples in both Studies 3 and 4 were broadly in line with similar studies of young adults, with network sizes of around 400 to 500 Facebook friends and less than 100 Twitter followers, and the almost exclusive use of restrictive privacy settings on Facebook indicating close similarities to the findings of various large-scale US-based studies (e.g. Madden, 2012; Madden et al., 2013; Madden & Smith, 2010). The students surveyed in Study 4 also demonstrated remarkably similar levels of awareness of social recruiting and knowledge of professionally risky behaviour on social media to the US-based students sampled by Root and McKay (2014). Therefore, whilst the young adults sampled in this thesis may have been based at similar types of universities, numerous aspects of their social media use and perceptions of professional risk appeared representative of young adults based elsewhere.

With regards to the representativeness of the findings reported in the first two empirical studies, the analysis of "professionally appropriate" online

behaviour in Study 1 was limited to the social media policies of large multinational organisations with widely recognised brands. However, this sample represented organisations from a broad range of industry sectors, with almost all running graduate training and internship programs as of 2015 (n = 28, 93.3%). This point underscores the relevance of the policies to young adults, such as those sampled in Studies 3, 4, and 5, who, like an increasing number of graduates (e.g. High Fliers, 2015), are opting to enter these types of structured programs following graduation and find themselves the subject of the specific guidelines for social media use.

Similarly, the higher education institution (HEI) involved in Study 2 represented a unique organisational context in which to study employee use of social media given its dual functionality as both a provider of education and commercial enterprise (e.g. Whitchurch, 2006; Whitchurch, 2007). However, many of the perceptions of professional risk and challenges of personal-professional boundary management identified in the experiences of employees appeared to reflect those outlined in the findings of Studies 1 and 5, in addition to the related literature (e.g. Lampinen et al., 2009; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

A second limitation considered is the generalisability of the findings on the basis of the size of the samples used within the thesis. Study 1's sample size of 30 documents was relatively small compared to the 255 policies hosted on Boudreaux's (2014) online social media policy database[5], whilst the 14 employees interviewed in Study 2 and 20 graduate management trainees and year-in-industry interns sampled in Study 5 only just exceeded the lower limits proposed for qualitative research (e.g. Bertaux, 1981) and reaching data saturation in non-probabilistic samples (e.g. Guest et al., 2006). However, the core objective of these qualitative studies was not to produce generalisable

[5] As of 1st September 2014.

findings, but rather investigate the perceptions and the management of professional risk on social media in a rich and detailed way, from the organisational and employee perspectives. While larger samples were sought for increased representativeness of different industry sectors and job roles, the point at which to close recruitment was judged by considering both the practical constraints of continued data collection and the point at which few novel themes emerged from the documents or interviews.

For the survey-based Studies 3 and 4, the sample sizes of 257 participants for both were also relatively small for generalising findings to a wider population of young adults. Furthermore, the opportunistic approach to sampling adopted in Study 3 contributed to the creation of unequal numbers of cases across the four levels of the grouping variable, with final-year undergraduates particularly underrepresented compared to students at earlier stages of study. As detailed in Section 6.3.4, this appeared to pose issues with respect to subsequently interpreting the findings within this phase of the analysis. A more desirable approach, therefore, would have been to adopt a more structured approach to sampling to ensure that the number of cases across levels of the grouping variable was both greater and more balanced. Nevertheless, the sample sizes in these quantitative studies were satisfactory for conducting both principal components analyses and multiple regression analyses (Comrey & Lee, 1992; Green, 1991).

A third limitation relating particularly to Studies 3, 4, and 5 was that whilst the perception and management of professional risk on social media was examined amongst young adult users prior to, during, and following organisational entry, self-report cross-sectional methods were used. Both qualitative longitudinal research (QLR: Farrall, 2009; Holland, Thomson, & Henderson, 2006) and quantitative cross-lagged panel designs (e.g. Kenny, 2014) have been used in social psychological studies, including those focusing on interactions with social media (e.g. Turkle, 2011; Z. Wang, Tchernev, &

Solloway, 2012). Adopting a similar approach, data could have been collected from students at each of the four stages of study identified in Study 3, and tracked over a number of years to provide a longitudinal, repeated measures design to explore causality rather than correlation. However, it is important to note that not only have some researchers questioned this assumption (e.g. Rogosa, 1980), but that the practical requirement of conducting the PhD research within three years made the approach unfeasible in this thesis.

A fourth limitation of the empirical studies presented in this thesis relates to the validity of the scale-based measures and credibility of the coding schemes developed. With reference to the former, the measures developed for the purposes of Studies 3 and 4 demonstrated adequate-to-good alpha coefficients according to the threshold levels outlined by Nunnally (1978), and therefore appeared to indicate satisfactory reliability. However, whilst pilot and content validation studies were conducted using the measures prior to both studies, following the detailed guidance of Hinkin (1998) to scale development, further work addressing the validity of the measures is required. Some of the findings indicated promise, however, with the relationships between self-regulatory control and various personality measures in Study 3 indicating convergent validity based on the behaviours represented, and the significant relationship between psychological distance and perceived risk supporting the predictive validity of the measure in relation to prior research theoretically linking the two concepts (e.g. Brewer et al., 2007; Chandran & Menon, 2004; Spence et al., 2012).

In relation to the qualitative studies in the thesis, Study 5 sought to utilise as many of the nine critical incident technique (CIT) credibility checks outlined by Butterfield et al. (2005) as possible. In particular, eight independent judges were asked to assign one-quarter of the 114 critical incidents recalled to each of the higher-level categories identified through the analysis. Though the overall agreement rate between the raters was high at 75%, the .50 Fleiss-Kappa value of inter-rater reliability was at the lower end of "intermediate-to-good"

agreement (Fleiss, 1981), indicating that the credibility of the coding scheme could ideally have been greater. Whilst no formal credibility checks of inter-rater reliability were conducted for the coding and thematic analyses conduced in Studies 1 and 2, a second researcher was involved in the co-construction of candidate themes in the earlier stages of analysis within the latter study and several iterations of the coding and thematic analyses were conducted in accordance with the detailed guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006). Nevertheless, the credibility of the final themes would be improved by seeking to establish levels of inter-rater agreement, as attempted in Study 5.

9.5 FUTURE WORK

This chapter has illustrated a number of areas in which the empirical findings of the thesis could be further developed and extended by future work. This is particularly the case with respect to the core finding of the thesis, that psychological distance of professional audience predicted perceptions of professional risk amongst young adults using Facebook. This relationship was found in Study 4 through a survey-based design, in which non-primed attitudes towards temporal, social, and hypothetical psychological distances of employer surveillance on Facebook were measured. In contrast, further work could apply the prevailing experimental methodology associated with construal-level theory (CLT) and psychological distance research (e.g. Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope et al., 2007) to examine whether manipulating the psychological distance of professional audience online still influences perceptions of professional risk through a more controlled approach.

One particular illustration of how this might be approached is through the multiple studies reported by Chandran and Menon (2004), who investigated the effects of temporal framing on judgments of health risk. Using CLT as the theoretical framework, the authors manipulated the framing of temporal distance for short messages communicating health risks, finding a significant

effect of temporal distance not only on risk perceptions but also intentions to engage in preventive behaviours. Future research could use a similar design in which information about the professional risk of social recruiting is framed in either proximal or distal terms to prime low or high levels of construal, with different conditions relating to the multiple dimensions of psychological distance (e.g. Liberman et al., 2007). Given the bi-directional relationship between construal-level theory and psychological distance (e.g. Liberman & Trope, 2008), further validation of the effect could be offered by framing the information in either low-level, highly specific concrete terms or high-level, vague abstract terms to prime proximal or distal psychological distance of professional audience, respectively.

A core focus of future work addressing the role of psychological distance of professional audience in the context of social media should also extend beyond risk perception to engagement in prevention behaviours. This chapter has already outlined a number of implications based on the findings of the current thesis for educating young adults about social media literacy, but more research is required in examining the conditions in which greater perceptions of professional risk subsequently lead to reputation management strategies to prevent its expression. Indeed, Study 5 outlined the complexity of these responses, with an apparent influence of both the type of incident leading to increased risk perception and the specific platform being used, with Facebook typically involving different strategies to Twitter. Future work should take these factors into account, and ideally use a longitudinal design to investigate changes over time with the same individuals. This approach may be particularly promising for following young adults as they negotiate the college-to-work transition, collecting data regularly throughout the complex and challenging process of organisational entry.

The findings of Study 4 also indicated a positive relationship between psychological distance of professional audience on Facebook and trust in the

site's privacy settings to prevent them from accessing potentially risky content. Whilst statistically significant, the association represented a relatively weak effect size so future research could also examine the possible role of psychological distance as a psychological mechanism underpinning perceptions of privacy. It would seem especially useful to investigate the relationship on both Facebook and Twitter, where boundary management strategies were found to differ markedly amongst young adults in terms of the use of privacy settings. In particular, the hypothesis that privacy settings may serve to introduce psychological distance between shared content and unwanted professional audiences is one that has potentially important implications for how much of an emphasis should subsequently be placed upon educating users to "lock down" their profiles in comparison to self-regulating online interactions. Indeed, the tentative relationship found in this thesis suggests that over-reliance upon the former may create a false sense of security that subsequently inhibits the latter, but more research is required to examine this possibility.

Finally, the empirical findings of this thesis underscored the seemingly paradoxical nature of professional risk upon social media, with many types of online behaviour representing the potential to both help and hinder one's professional reputation, depending on the particular circumstances. Indeed, employee experiences of using social media to support work-related activity indicated the importance of professional judgment in situations where a sarcastic tweet or photo of extracurricular socialising could have important reputational consequences in positive and negative forms. Future work could draw upon the regulatory focus theory (RFT) framework proposed by E. T. Higgins (1997) to look in more depth at the roles of a prevention focus on safety and responsibilities whilst using social media, compared to a promotion focus on accomplishments and aspirations. Given that regulatory focus can be both induced in its state-based form (Freitas & Higgins, 2002; E. T. Higgins et al., 2001) and measured in its pre-dispositional form (E. T. Higgins et al., 2001), the

substantial body of work developed by Higgins and colleagues could be adapted and extended to the context of digital reputation management upon social media in order to determine the relative influence of each on the expression of professionally risky behaviour amongst young adults.

10

CONCLUSIONS

> "There is a little darkness, a little risk, in any real life… A life without shadows cannot be real. A flawless, perfectly, digitally ethical society would be too well drawn, and would not be good for individuals. A little noise, not too much, is needed if there is to be creativity or individuality."
>
> *You Are Not A Gadget*, Lanier (2010, p. 201)

The research presented throughout this thesis has provided an initial, but detailed examination of professional risk within the context of social media. It has also outlined the mental and behavioural strategies used by individuals to mitigate its expression, and the factors influencing its prevalence amongst young adults, who despite seemingly being aware of the potentially damaging reputational consequences often still continue to behave in ways that threaten their professional reputation. This thesis has presented evidence to suggest that a likely factor in why young adults behave in professionally risky ways is the construal of professional audience upon social media as psychologically distant. However, this only appears to be in relation to behaviours where the risk is already well understood, such as posts featuring overtly anti-social or controversial content. In contrast, young adults appear to be relatively unaware of the professional risks associated with their style of communication, indicating a likely "blind spot" that has also been identified in related studies (Root & McKay, 2014).

As discussed in the previous chapter, these findings have implications for the design of educational and technological interventions. Specifically, building

knowledge, awareness, and ultimately skills around managing the professional risks of communication style may be the most beneficial approach for addressing the apparent lack of risk awareness in this area. In contrast, young adults already appear to be largely aware of the risks to professional reputation that are associated with anti-social or controversial content. Therefore, shifting the focus from building knowledge of professional risk to an emphasis on the concrete, tangible presence of professional audiences online may help in motivating members of this cohort to actively mitigate the potentially damaging reputational consequences of their actions.

However, in outlining these implications, an assumption is made that it will ultimately be beneficial for young adults, and perhaps also even younger adolescents and children, if they can be assisted in conforming to the expectations and norms of "professionally appropriate" behaviour defined by prospective and current employers. Indeed, a similar belief appears to underpin the design of digital reputation management systems (DRMSs), such as those evaluated in Study 5, and is further reinforced through the advice provided by parents and career advisors. From this perspective, the guidance appears clear in emphasising caution, vigilance, and above all, consideration of the potential consequences for professional reputation. As illustrated by the employees interviewed in Studies 2 and 5, this approach was demonstrated even within online spaces restricted by privacy controls, further underlining the perceived need for disciplined behaviour on social media.

And yet, the same studies also illustrated the complexity and inherent fallibility of human decision-making in situations defined by potentially conflicting goals, whether in the form of a passionate blog entry discussing social injustice, a sarcastic status update mocking a public figure, or an excitable tweet about meeting friends for drinks. Each action conveyed elements of both individuality and professional risk, sneaking through the otherwise stoic resolve of digital self-censorship routines reinforced by organizational social media

policies. Expecting celebrities, public figures, and perhaps even professionals working amongst vulnerable populations to approach the use of social media with extreme caution is perhaps understandable. Expecting a teenager like Paris Brown (see Chapter 1) to perhaps forever bear the burden of her adolescent actions is arguably less so.

According to Jaron Lanier (2010), the rise of Web 2.0 has contributed towards the steady reductionism of digital identities, with social media users "locked in" to pre-assigned categories of social identity that no longer adequately reflect the individuality of the humans to whom they refer. A similar analogy may be drawn with regards to the relationship between organisations and the future members of their workforce. In order to build more substantive relationships with customers, organisations and brands adopt digital marketing strategies that will enable them to appear more like people through their use of social media, whilst actual people are simultaneously being nudged towards thinking and behaving more like commercial entities online. Specifically, with organisations reinforcing the professional liability of employees upon social media through punitive measures, digital identities appear likely to become increasingly "locked in" to conformist, risk-averse, and "lowest-common denominator" digital identities (e.g. Hogan, 2010; Lampinen et al., 2009). In the longer-term, these digital facsimiles of individuality may be beneficial for neither organisations nor individuals.

Nevertheless, the empirical findings presented throughout this thesis indicate that the power to define boundaries of "appropriate behaviour" online appears to reside primarily with organisations, rather than individuals. However, in proposing potential interventions that may effectively further reinforce these norms, it is perhaps important to also consider the type of web we want for current and future generations, and the role of commercial entities in shaping it. This thesis therefore concludes with two potential courses of action. The first relates to the shorter-term goal of ensuring the employability of

young adults, and is guided primarily by the preceding discussion of potential interventions, such as focusing upon digital literacy and the design of digital reputation management systems. Additionally, more research is required, and this thesis has demonstrated how the construal-level theory of psychological distance represents one particularly promising framework through which to examine the perception and management of professional risky behaviour amongst young adults using social media.

The second approach is potentially more complex and relates to a longer-term proposition, in which young adults must be both allowed and encouraged to act like young adults upon social media; not simply within the parameters set out by organisational policies, but as real humans, replete with the unpredictable capacity for brilliance, miscalculation, and everything else in between. Such an approach is likely to require significant structural changes, and civil initiatives such as iRights (2016) are performing an admirable feat in pushing for a better digital world for children and young people through the proposed implementation of a universal framework of digital rights to be built into the design of digital spaces. Central to this movement is the notion of re-empowering individuals in their use of social media, and perhaps fulfilling some of the ideals that Time Magazine so boldly envisioned for the user-generated, participative web just one decade ago (Grossman, 2006). Above all else, though, this is a proposition that will require organisations to trust their employees to express individuality across digital spaces.

This, after all, is perhaps what we really mean by professional risk within the digital economy.

PART V

APPENDIX

A

APPENDIX TO STUDY 1

Initial Inductive Coding Scheme

1. Character and Personality Traits

- Honesty
- Respect
- Tolerance
- Emotion
- Offensiveness
- Niceness
- Balance
- Common Sense
- Humour
- Having Fun
- Responsibility
- Awareness of Others' Feelings and Motives
- Fit with Organizational Values
- Fit with Organizational Strategy
- Adaptation to Social Situations
- Interaction with Others
- Professionalism
- Sensitivity to Social Conditions

2. Social Media Literacy

- Privacy
- Connections
- Social Media Characteristics
- Permanency
- Virality
- Vigilance
- Cautiousness
- Consideration of Professional Consequences
- Risk Awareness
- Communication Style
- Conscientiousness
- Reviewing Content
- Verification
- Expressing Personal Views
- Political Views
- Talking About Controversial Issues
- Religious Views
- Expressing Professional Views
- Talking About Other Employers
- Developing a Personal Strategy

3. Legal Familiarity

- Legal
- Copyright
- Potential for Legal Action
- Violation of Privacy Terms
- Ownership Rights

4. Professional Use of Social Media

B

APPENDIX TO STUDY 2

1. *Background Information:*

    - Job role at the University
    - Information about career
    - Use of social media sites
    - Size of network(s)
    - Motivations for using the sites

2. *Use for Work Purposes:*

    - Using social media to support professional activity
    - Identification as a Middleton University employee
    - Expectations for engaging with social media

3. *Social Groups/Audiences:*

    - Relative importance of different social groups/audiences on social media
    - Changes in importance over time
    - Examples of conflicts or opportunities
    - Personal-professional boundary management

4. *Perceived Reputation(s) of Self and Others:*

    - Perception of own reputation(s) on social media
    - Other people of interest online
    - Examples of positive/negative situations resulting from use of social media

5. *Management of Professional Risk*

    - Professionally appropriate/inappropriate behaviour on social media
    - Differences across social media platforms
    - Role of other peoples' judgment
    - Considering the professional consequences of online behaviour

Initial Inductive Coding Scheme

0) MISC

1) CAUTIOUS BEHAVIOUR ON SM

2) TIME RESTRICTIONS

3) AUDIENCE SIZE

4) USE OF SM BY ORGS. TO FORM IMPRESSIONS

5) USE OF SM BY ORGS. TO SCREEN CANDIDATES

6) THINKS BEFORE POSTING

7) AVOIDANCE OF SHARING MUNDANE CONTENT

8) EMPOWERMENT

9) SM = PERSONAL ONLY

10) REPRESENTATION OF THE ORG.

11) AUTHENTICITY

12) TIMELINE (FACEBOOK)

13) ADDICTION

14) INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

15) VISIBILITY

16) CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

17) VIRALITY

18) ETHICS

19) IDEAL IDENTITY

20) REGULARITY OF USE OF SM

21) HUMOUR

22) PROACTIVE USE OF SM FOR WORK

23) SELF-OPPORTUNITIES/PROMOTION

24) POLITICS

25) POWER

26) STUDENTS

27) ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

28) AUDIENCE TYPE, COMPOSITION

29) JOB ROLE

30) TEMPORALITY

31) INCREASE IN ACTIVITY THROUGH WORK USAGE

32) PROFESSIONAL SELF

33) INFORMAL COMMUNICATION

34) PERMANENCY

35) OVERSHARING

36) NOVELTY

37) EMOTION ON SM

38) MIXED NETWORKS

39) LEGALITY

40) DIFFICULTY IN USING SM

41) PRIVACY

42) ORGANISATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, PROMOTION

43) EXPECTATIONS

44) ANXIETY

45) RELIANCE

46) POSITIVITY

47) SURVEILLANCE

48) FAMILY

49) APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR

50) IDENTITY DEFINITION

51) ORGANISATIONAL RESTRICTIONS

52) TEAM USE OF SM

53) COMMON SENSE

54) CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

55) SEPARATING PROFESSIONAL/PERSONAL IDENTITY

56) BROADCASTING CONTENT

57) PROFESSIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

58) UNIFIED PROFESSIONAL/PERSONAL IDENTITY

59) INFORMATION SEARCHING

60) SM GUIDELINES/GOOD PRACTICE

61) SECTOR INFLUENCE ON SM USE

62) CONTROL

63) SM USE AS A TIME DRAIN

64) EXPRESSION OF STANCE/OPINION

65) REACTIVE RATHER THAN PROACTIVE USE

66) KEEPING UPDATED

67) SAFETY

68) RESPONSIBILITIES

69) CONCERN ABOUT TYPE OF CONTENT

70) FREEDOM

71) APPROPRIATENESS OF MEDIUM FOR PURPOSE

72) OFFLINE-ONLINE REPRESENTATION

73) CONFIDENTIALITY

74) REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

75) UNPREDICTABILITY OF SUCCESSFUL CONTENT

76) AVOIDANCE OF CRITICISM

77) TRUST

78) DISCLAIMER

79) CONSISTENCY

80) SM USE AS A SKILL

81) EXPERIENCE IN USING SM

82) COMMUNICATION

83) CONCERN ABOUT MISINTERPRETATION

84) REFLECTION

85) DISCUSSION

86) NEED TO BE INTERESTING

87) ORGANISATION-RELATED CONTENT

88) INSTANTANEOUS

89) FUTURE OF SM

90) ORGANISATIONAL USE

91) TALKING ABOUT THE ORG.

92) VOICE

93) UNKNOWN FOLLOWERS/AUDIENCE

94) GENDER

95) SARCASM

96) LACK OF CONTEXT

97) SEXUALITY

98) POPULARITY OF PLATFORM/IMPACT ON WORK

99) DIFFERENT PLATFORMS/DIFFERENT CONTENT

100) SM USERS = PARTICULAR 'TYPE' OF PERSON

101) FRIENDING/FOLLOWING /LINKING

102) EMOTION IN USING SM

103) AVOIDANCE OF CONTROVERSIAL CONTENT

104) USE BY OTHERS

105) INCREASE IN SM USE THROUGH DEVICES

106) CONFIDENCE

107) ANONYMITY

108) SHARING CONTENT

109) INTEGRITY

110) REFLEXIVITY WITH AUDIENCE

111) CHANGES IN AUDIENCE

112) IDENTITY PRESERVATION/PROTECTION

113) MALEVOLENT OTHERS

114) TIME TAKEN TO POST

115) APPROACHABILITY

116) EXPRESSING VULNERABILITY

117) NARCISSIM/SELF-AWARENESS

118) SUPERFICIAL ENGAGEMENT/DEPTH OF ENGAGEMENT

119) RETROSPECTIVE AMENDMENT

120) 'SHOULD' SELF-IDENTITY

121) AVOIDING OFFENDING OTHERS

122) DOCUMENTING

123) TEACHING

124) CONTENT QUALITY

125) RESISTANCE

126) JUDGEMENT

127) 'ACTUAL' SELF-IDENTITY

128) BRAND

129) RISK VS. REWARD

130) EMPLOYABILITY PROTECTION

131) GENERATIONS

132) MEMORY

133) RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

134) ACCIDENTS/UNINTENDED ACTIONS

135) MEDIA REPORTS

Initial Candidate Themes

1. **DEFINITIONS OF PROFESSIONAL RISK ON SOCIAL MEDIA**
   - 1.1 Expression of Individuality
   - 1.2 Inadequate Self-Regulation
   - 1.3 Risky Use by Others

2. **REPUTATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**
   - 2.1 Self-Regulation of Interactions
   - 2.2 Profile Modification
   - 2.3 Privacy Control
   - 2.4 Personal-Professional Boundary Management
   - 2.5 Use of Disclaimer

3. **FACTORS INFLUENCING RISKY BEHAVIOUR**
   - 3.1 Visibility of Data
   - 3.2 Virality of Data
   - 3.3 Permanency of Data
   - 3.4 Lack of Context
   - 3.5 Unknown Audience
   - 3.6 Instantaneousness of Media
   - 3.7 Academic Freedom of Speech

4. **PROFESSIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**
   - 4.1 Use on Behalf of the Organisation
   - 4.2 Use on Behalf of Self
   - 4.3 Student Use of Social Media
   - 4.4 Expectations of Professional Use
   - 4.5 Challenges in Using Social Media

C

APPENDIX TO STUDY 3

Online Survey Items

Q1. What is your gender? *Please select from below:*

- ❍ Male
- ❍ Female
- ❍ (Rather not say)

Q2. What is your age? *Please enter below, in years:*

Q3. How did you come to this survey? *Please select one of the options below:*

- ❍ Via social media
- ❍ Via poster
- ❍ Via email
- ❍ Via teacher/lecturer
- ❍ University event
- ❍ Presentation/talk by researcher
- ❍ Research Participation Scheme (University of Nottingham)
- ❍ Other _____

Q4. What is your current role? *Please select the one that best represents your main role at present:*

- ❍ College/Sixth Form Student
- ❍ Undergraduate Student
- ❍ Other _____
- ❍ Postgraduate Student

Q5.1 ***(If Undergraduate student)*** **What year are you currently in on your undergraduate course?** *Please indicate one of the responses below:*

- ❍ First year
- ❍ Middle year(s)
- ❍ Final year
- ❍ Other _____

Q6.1 ***(If Undergraduate or Postgraduate student)*** **What do you intend to do next after finishing your studies?** *Please select a single response from the choices below:*

- ❍ Continued study
- ❍ Full-time employment
- ❍ Other _____
- ❍ Don't know

**

In the following section, you will be presented with three sets of questions that ask about how you tend to behave, both in general and in specific situations. As you answer each question, please keep in mind the labels of the scale presented along the top of the columns, as this will differ slightly for each set of questions. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions - please just provide your initial response to each question.

Q7. Please indicate the degree to which the following statements are true of you:
On a rating scale of:

Certainly, always FALSE 1	Generally FALSE 2	Somewhat FALSE 3	Somewhat TRUE, but with exception 4	Generally TRUE 5	Certainly, always TRUE 6

1. In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behaviour if I feel that something else is called for.
2. I am often able to read people's true emotions correctly through their eyes.
3. I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them.
4. In conversations, I am sensitive to even the slightest change in the facial expression of the person I'm conversing with.
5. My powers of intuition are quite good when it comes to understanding others' emotions and motives.
6. I can usually tell when others consider a joke to be in bad taste, even though they may laugh convincingly.
7. When I feel that the image I am portraying isn't working, I can readily change it to something that does.
8. I can usually tell when I've said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener's eyes.
9. I have trouble changing my behaviour to suit different people and different situations.
10. I have found that I can adjust my behaviour to meet the requirements of any situation I find myself in.
11. If someone is lying to me, I usually know it at once from that person's manner of expression
12. Even when it might be to my advantage, I have difficulty putting up a good front.
13. Once I know what the situation calls for, it's easy for me to regulate my actions accordingly.

Q8. Please indicate the degree to which the following statements are true of you:
On a rating scale of:

Rarely/Never 1	Occasionally 2	Often 3	Almost always/always 4

1. I plan tasks carefully
2. I do things without thinking
3. I don't "pay attention"
4. I am self-controlled
5. I concentrate easily
6. I am a careful thinker
7. I say things without thinking
8. I act on the spur of the moment

Q9. For the following set of statements, please select responses that describe yourself as you generally are now; not as you wish to be in the future. Please describe yourself as you honestly see yourself, in relation to other people you know of the same sex as you are, and roughly your same age.
On a rating scale of:

Very Inaccurate 1	Moderately Inaccurate 2	Neither Accurate nor Inaccurate 3	Moderately Accurate 4	Very Accurate 5

1. I am the life of the party.
2. I sympathise with others' feelings.
3. I get chores done right away.
4. I have frequent mood swings.
5. I have a vivid imagination.
6. I don't talk a lot.
7. I am not interested in other people's problems.
8. I often forget to put things back in their proper place.
9. I am relaxed most of the time.
10. I am not interested in abstract ideas.
11. I talk to a lot of different people at parties.
12. I feel others' emotions.
13. I like order.
14. I get upset easily.
15. I have difficulty understanding abstract ideas.
16. I keep in the background.
17. I am not really interested in others.
18. I make a mess of things.
19. I seldom feel blue.
20. I do not have a good imagination.

**

The following section will ask you a range of questions about your use of social media. It is recommended that if you have not done so already, to log-in to the sites that you use and have them open in separate tabs of your browser.

Q10. For which of the following social media sites are you a registered user?

	Yes	No (and never have been)	No longer (but used to be)
Facebook	❍	❍	❍
Twitter	❍	❍	❍
LinkedIn	❍	❍	❍

Q11. *(If 'No and never have been' to Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn)* **Why do you not use Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn?** *Please describe briefly in the space below:*

Q12. In what year did you start to use Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn? (If unsure, go to your profile page) *Please select an option from the following:*

- ❍ 2004
- ❍ 2005
- ❍ 2006
- ❍ 2007
- ❍ 2008
- ❍ 2009
- ❍ 2010
- ❍ 2011
- ❍ 2012
- ❍ 2013
- ❍ Don't Know

Q13. How many people are you connected with through your social media profile(s)? If unsure of how to find the number of friends/followers in your networks, please click here to watch short clips of how to do so (this will load in a separate tab):

- ❍ Facebook Friends
- ❍ Twitter Followers
- ❍ LinkedIn Connections

Q14. If you use both Facebook and Twitter, which would you say you have used more frequently in the past few months? *Please select one of the options:*

- ❍ Facebook
- ❍ Twitter

Q15. On average, approximately how long do you spend using Facebook/Twitter/LinkedIn per day?

Please select a single response that represents your ACTIVE USE of the site per day (e.g. posting status updates, checking news feed, sending messages, commenting, looking at other people's profiles, and so on.):

- ❍ Less than 5 mins
- ❍ 5 - 15 mins
- ❍ 15 - 30 mins
- ❍ 30 - 60 mins
- ❍ 1 - 2 hours
- ❍ 2 - 3 hours
- ❍ 3+ hours
- ❍ Don't know

Q16. Who can see the things you post on your Facebook Timeline? You can find this information by accessing your Facebook privacy settings. If unsure of how to do this, please click here to watch a short clip (this will open in a separate tab).

Please select a response from the list below that best relates to your current settings:

- ❍ Posts are public
- ❍ Posts can only be seen by friends (including any customised lists)
- ❍ Other _____

Q17. Who can see content on your Twitter profile? You can find this information by accessing your Twitter settings. If unsure of how to do this, please click here to watch a short video clip (this will open in a separate tab). Please select a response from the choices below that best relates to your current settings:

- ❍ Tweets are public (i.e. the box titled saying 'protected' is UNTICKED)
- ❍ Tweets can only be seen by confirmed followers (i.e. the box titled saying 'protected' is TICKED)

Q18. With reference to your use of the site in the past few months, please indicate how frequently you engage in the following behaviours when using Facebook or Twitter (NOTE: base your answer upon which you use most often):

On a rating scale of:

NEVER behave this way 1	RARELY behave this way 2	SOMETIMES behave this way 3	OFTEN behave this way 4	ALWAYS behave this way 5

1. I take time before posting to consider how a potential employer might judge my actions
2. I post things to my profile in order to look like a hard worker
3. I post about things that would seem unprofessional if discussed in a face-to-face context
4. I avoid posting anything that might cause a potential employer to think that I'm lazy
5. I use my profile to promote the things I have achieved through my work
6. I delay posting to consider how my actions could influence future career opportunities
7. I spend time evaluating whether past activity on my profile could restrict what I'm able to do next in my career
8. Once I've posted something, I deliberate over whether I could modify it in some way to make

myself look better
9. I find myself posting about whatever I'm angry or upset about at the time
10. I post first and then deal with any consequences later
11. I find it difficult to avoid swearing in my posts
12. Before posting, I pause to consider how people joining my network at a later date might judge my actions
13. I hesitate before posting to consider how my actions might affect someone else's image
14. I use my profile as a way of venting any frustrations I have with my work
15. I read articles about how I should adapt my profile so that it is appropriate for a professional audience
16. I avoid using my profile to talk about things I have accomplished through my work
17. I promote the image I have created for myself as if it were a brand
18. Before posting, I try to anticipate its impact on the reputation of groups or organisations I'm associated with
19. I post things so that others will think of me as a competent person
20. I post about the things I'm working on so that others might judge me to be a hard-worker
21. I hold back from using my profile to comment on things that I feel very strongly about
22. I look back through older posts on my profile to decide if any could pose a threat to my current image
23. I post with little consideration for how my actions might affect other people's images
24. I take time to make sure that my posts are spelled correctly
25. I avoid posting in a way that might cause others to think of me as a negative person

Q19. Have you ever removed one of your own posts, on the basis that it might harm your career prospects in some way?

	Yes	No
Facebook	❍	❍
Twitter	❍	❍
LinkedIn	❍	❍

Q20. Have you ever removed a post by someone else, on the basis that it might harm your career prospects in some way?

	Yes	No
Facebook	❍	❍
Twitter	❍	❍
LinkedIn	❍	❍

Q21. Have you ever restricted someone else's access to your profile because you felt their online behaviour might harm your career prospects in some way?

	Yes	No
Facebook	❍	❍
Twitter	❍	❍
LinkedIn	❍	❍

Q22. Have you ever completely removed or blocked someone from your network because you felt their online behaviour might harm your career prospects in some way?

	Yes	No
Facebook	❍	❍
Twitter	❍	❍
LinkedIn	❍	❍

D

APPENDIX TO STUDY 4

Online Survey Items

Q1. For approximately how long have you used Facebook? *(If unsure, go to your Timeline page and look at the dates presented on the right-hand side)*

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- 6 years
- 7 years
- 8 years
- 9 years
- Don't Know

Q2. On average, approximately how much time do you spend using Facebook per day?
Please select a single response that represents your ACTIVE USE of the site per day (e.g. posting status updates, checking news feed, sending messages, commenting, looking at other people's profiles, etc):

- Less than 5 mins
- 5 – 15 mins
- 15 – 30 mins
- 30 – 60 mins
- 1 – 2 hours
- 2 – 3 hours
- 3+ hours
- Don't Know

Q3. Approximately how many Facebook friends do you have?
NOTE: If unsure of how to find the number of friends in your Facebook network, please click [here] to watch a short clip (this will load in a separate window)

- Less than 100
- 100 – 199
- 200 – 299
- 300 – 399
- 400 – 499
- 500 – 599
- 600 – 699
- 700 – 799
- 800 – 899
- 900 – 999
- More than 1000
- Don't Know

Q4. Who can see the things you post on your Facebook Timeline?

You can find this information by accessing your Facebook privacy settings. If unsure of how to do this, please click *[here]* to watch a short clip (this will open in a separate

window).

Please select a response from the list below that best relates to your current settings:

- Posts are public
- Posts can only be seen by friends (including any customised lists)
- Other (please state)

Q5. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement:

I trust my Facebook privacy settings to successfully prevent employers from finding any Facebook content that could limit my job prospects

(1) STRONGLY DISAGREE → (4) Neither Disagree nor Agree → (7) STRONGLY AGREE

Q6. Psychological Distance

The following section presents 10 short statements relating to the possibility of employers referring to the Facebook profiles of job seekers to judge their suitability as potential employees. Please use the rating scales to respond accordingly. There are no right or wrong answers to these items - please just provide your 'gut instinct' responses.

(1) They have already started	(2) Within the coming days	(3) Within the coming weeks	(4) Within the next few months	(5) Within the next 6 months	(6) Within the next year	(7) Never

[TempDis1] When, if at all, do you think employers will be looking at your Facebook profile?

(1) STRONGLY DISAGREE	(2)	(3)	(4) NEITHER DISAGREE NOR AGREE	(5)	(6)	(7) STRONGLY AGREE

[TempDis2] Employers will be looking at my Facebook profile only once I am very close to graduating

[TempDis3] I expect employers to be looking at my Facebook profile in the very near future, if not already

[SocDis1] Employers are most likely to look at the Facebook profiles of people seeking a similar type of job as me

[SocDis2] Employers are most likely to look at the Facebook profiles of job seekers using the site with similar regularity to me

[SocDis3] Employers are most likely to look at the Facebook profiles of job seekers with a significantly different size of friendship network to me

[SocDis4] The possibility of employers looking at Facebook profiles of job seekers is most likely to happen to other people, rather than to me

[HypDis1] It is almost certain that employers will be looking at my Facebook profile to judge my suitability as a potential employee

[HypDis2] It is highly unlikely that employers will be interested in looking at my Facebook profile

[HypDis3] There is a high probability that I will know if employers have been looking at my Facebook profile

Q7. Professional Risk on Facebook

The following section presents 20 Facebook posts made by fictitious users of the site. After you have looked at the post, imagine that it could be found on your own Facebook profile. Using the rating scale provided, please indicate how risky you think the post is in terms of potentially limiting your job prospects.

Imagine that the following posts can be found on your own Facebook profile. How risky do you think each post is in terms of potentially limiting your job prospects?

(1) NOT AT ALL RISKY	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7) EXTREMELY RISKY



[Profanity1]



[Profanity 2]



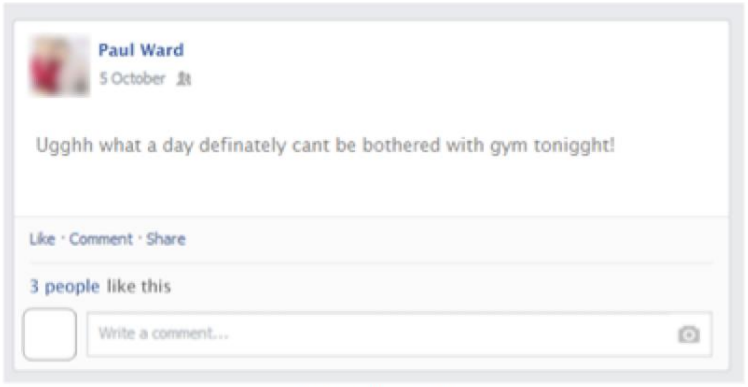
[Profanity 3]



[Profanity 4]



[Spelling1]



[Spelling 2]



[Spelling 3]



[Spelling 4]



[Derogatory 1]



[Derogatory 2]



[Derogatory 3]



[Derogatory 4]



[Drink/Drugs 1]



[Drink/Drugs 2]



[Drink/Drugs 3]



[Drink/Drugs 4]



[Criticism 1]



[Criticism 2]



[Criticism 3]



[Criticism 4]

Q8. What is your gender?
Please select from below:

- ❍ Male
- ❍ Female
- ❍ Other ___
- ❍ (Rather not say)

Q9. What is your age? Please enter below, in years:

Q10. What University do you attend?
[Drop down list of 132 UK-based Universities]

Q11. Which of the following best describes the faculty in which your course is based?

- ○ ARTS
- ○ ENGINEERING
- ○ MEDICINE AND HEALTH SCIENCES
- ○ SCIENCE
- ○ SOCIAL SCIENCES
- ○ OTHER (if unsure, please indicate course title below):
- ○ Don't know

Q12. Which of the following best describes the area in which you will be looking for a job following graduation?
[Drop down list of 21 job areas – compiled using www.prospects.ac.uk/types_of_jobs]

Q13. When do you intend to start actively applying for job positions?

- ○ (1) I have already started
- ○ (2) Within the coming days
- ○ (3) Within the coming weeks
- ○ (4) Within the next few months
- ○ (5) Within the next 6 months
- ○ (6) Within the next year

Q14. How did you find out about this survey?

- ○ Social media
- ○ Poster
- ○ Email
- ○ Lecturer
- ○ Friend/Coursemate(s)
- ○ University event
- ○ Presentation by researcher
- ○ Research Participation Scheme
- ○ Other (please state)

E

APPENDIX TO STUDY 5

1. *Background Information – Job Search*

   Topics covered:

   Type of degree; Brief overview of current role; Number of jobs applied to/interviews attended; Duration of job search; Extent of professional experience/training prior to employment; Clarity of type of desired employer

   Example questions:

   Q1: Tell me about your current job role.
   Follow up: What are your main responsibilities?

   Q2: Tell me about your degree course.
   Follow up: Did you develop any professional experience or do any training during your studies?

   Q3: Tell me about your job seeking experience.
   Follow up: How many jobs did you apply to? What was the timeline from start to finish of your job search?

2. *Use of Social Media During the Professional Transition*

   Topics covered:

   Extent that social media played a role in the job search (including any differences across platforms); Awareness of applicant social media presence being discussed at interviews/assessment centres; Attitudes towards potential link between digital presence and job prospects; Awareness of employers using social media to background check applicants - including self

   Example questions:

   Q4: What role, if any, did social media play during your job search?
   Follow up: Did this differ across social media platforms?

   Q5: How aware were you of the practice of social recruiting?
   Follow up: Were you aware of recruiters looking at applicant profiles on social media? Was your social media activity ever discussed at assessment events held by potential employers?

   Q6: What role, if any, has social media played since transitioning from student to professional?

Follow up: Again, has this differed across social media platforms?

3. *Critical Incidents - Digital Reputation Management During the Professional Transition*

Introduction:

"People regulate or manage the image that they present to others on Facebook in a number of ways.

There may be times where you have had to think about what to post or who to connect with when considering whether to take action.

At other times, you may have had to consider taking action in response to content that has already been published on your profile, or with respect to an existing connection in your friendship network.

I'd like you to now think of any instances that fit into these descriptions that occurred in your use of Facebook when making the transition from student to employee in the previous year."

Follow up questions:

For each incident described by the interviewee, the researcher will ask the following questions:

- What led up to the incident occurring? Why did it happen?
- In detail, what happened with the incident? At what stage of the job-seeking process did it occur?
- What informed your approach to responding in the incident?
- What consequences followed as a result of the incident?
- Was this an isolated incident, or did it happen on other occasions/with other users?

4. *Interaction with Digital Reputation Management Sites:*

Think Aloud instructions:

"Whilst exploring the following website, your task is to identify how many issues or content presented upon the site that *you agree would pose a risk to how professional others would judge your employability*.

While completing this task, I would like you to think aloud. That is, I would like you to verbalise what you wish to do as you navigate the site, what you think particular features do, and how features of the site match up to your expectations of what you think they should do.

This can sometimes be a tricky task so I'd like you to try the following exercise. I'd like you to tell me how many windows you have in your house while thinking aloud.
[Let them perform the exercise]
So, the point of this exercise is to emphasise that it is not simply the number of windows that I'm actually interested in but *how you go about the task.*

So, to reiterate: I'd like you to think aloud while using the following site to identify how many issues or content that *you agree would pose a risk to how professional others would judge your employability.*"

Example follow up questions following the TAP:

Q: Did you use any digital reputation management sites while making the transition from student to employee?
Follow up: If so, which ones? If not, why not?

Q: What information do you feel is most important for a site to provide to users wanting to effectively manage their digital reputation?

5. *Debrief:*

To be read by the researcher:

"The main aim of the study you just participated in was to draw upon the experiences of employees who recently made the transition from student to employee, in order to provide a functional description of digital reputation management behaviour on Facebook.

In other words, the experiences that you kindly shared as part of our interview will be combined with those of others having recently gone through a similar professional transition as yourself, and will be analysed to identify behaviours and situations that seem to be important to online behaviour during this period of professional transition.

This information and your experiences of using two existing systems that aim to assist with the process of digital reputation management will contribute to the development of a comprehensive set of user requirements that such digital reputation management sites would need to follow if their design is to support the aims they set out to achieve.

As a reminder, your participation in this study has been completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time following this interview session up until any potential publication of the findings. If you happen to personally know any colleagues who will also be interviewed, please respect the confidentiality of the study by not discussing your responses or seeking theirs.

If you would like to be kept in contact regarding any public dissemination of the findings, then please let me know via my email address (psxcc@nottingham.ac.uk).

QUESTION: Do you have any questions about the study?

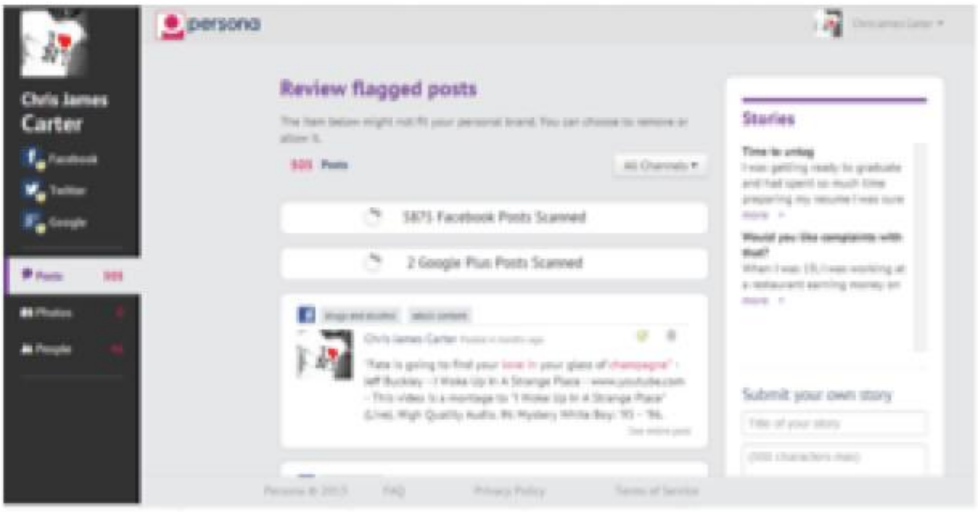
Thank you again for your time and please do not hesitate to get in contact should you have any further questions."

Digital Reputation Management Systems User Interfaces

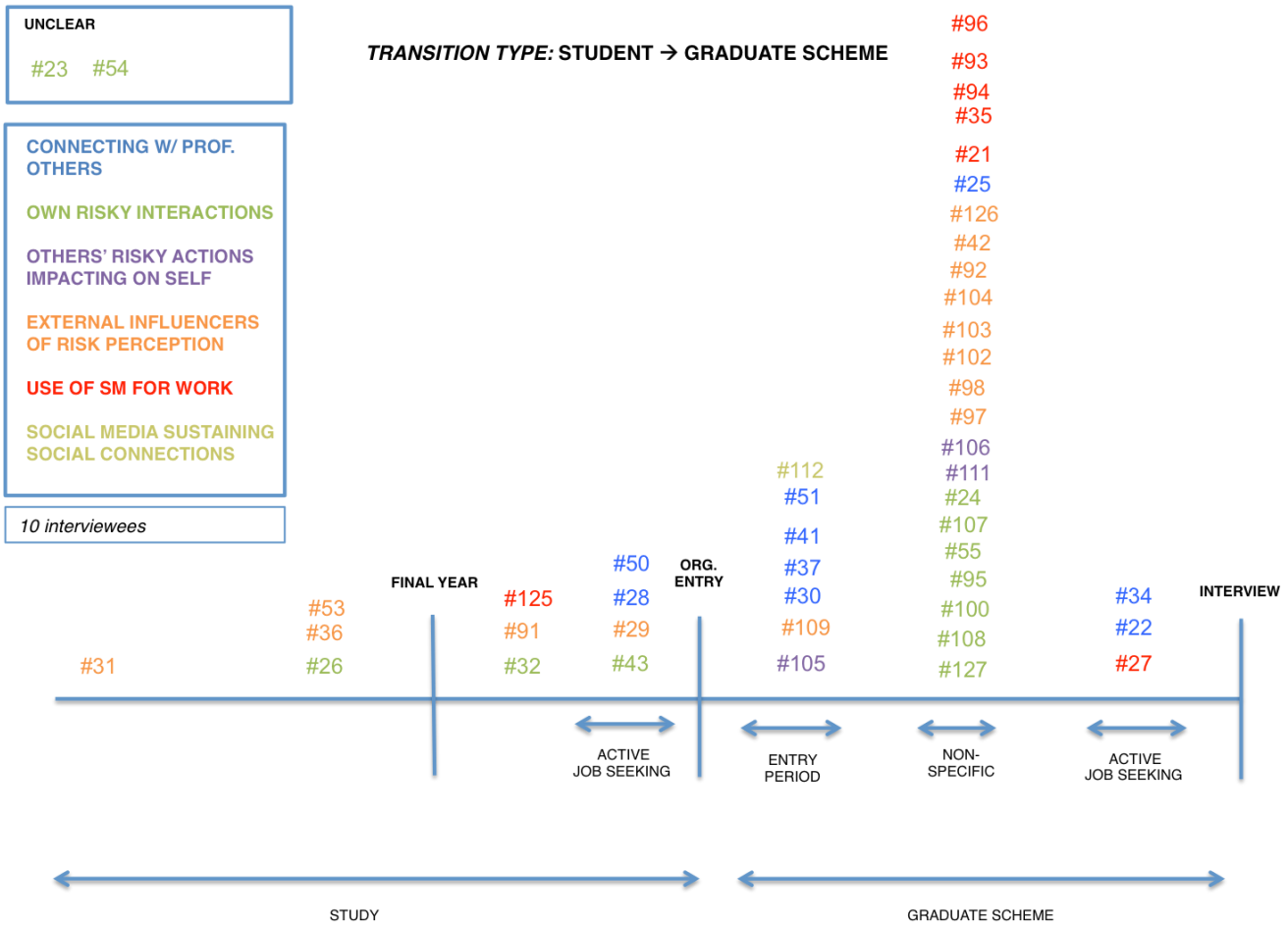
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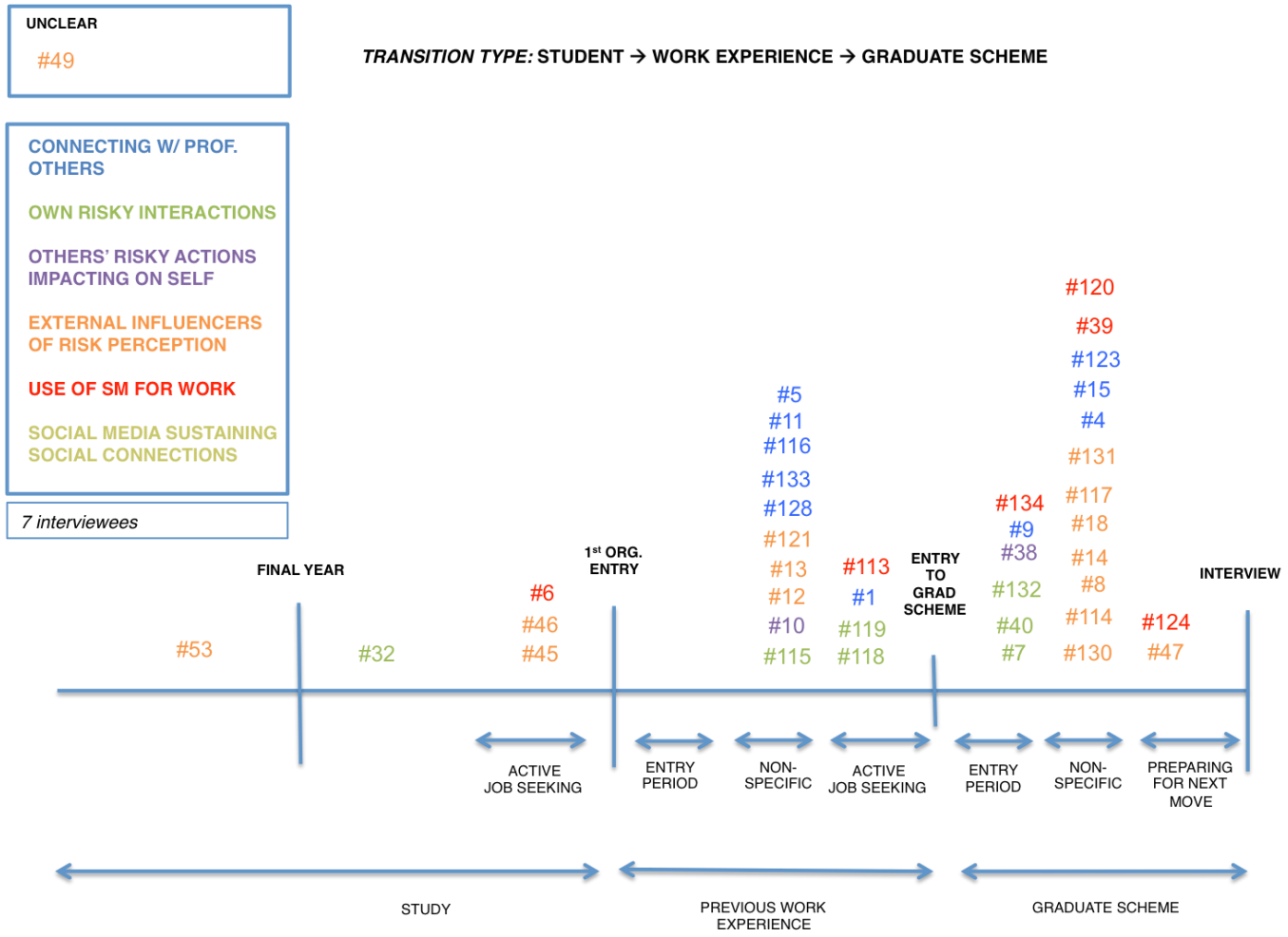


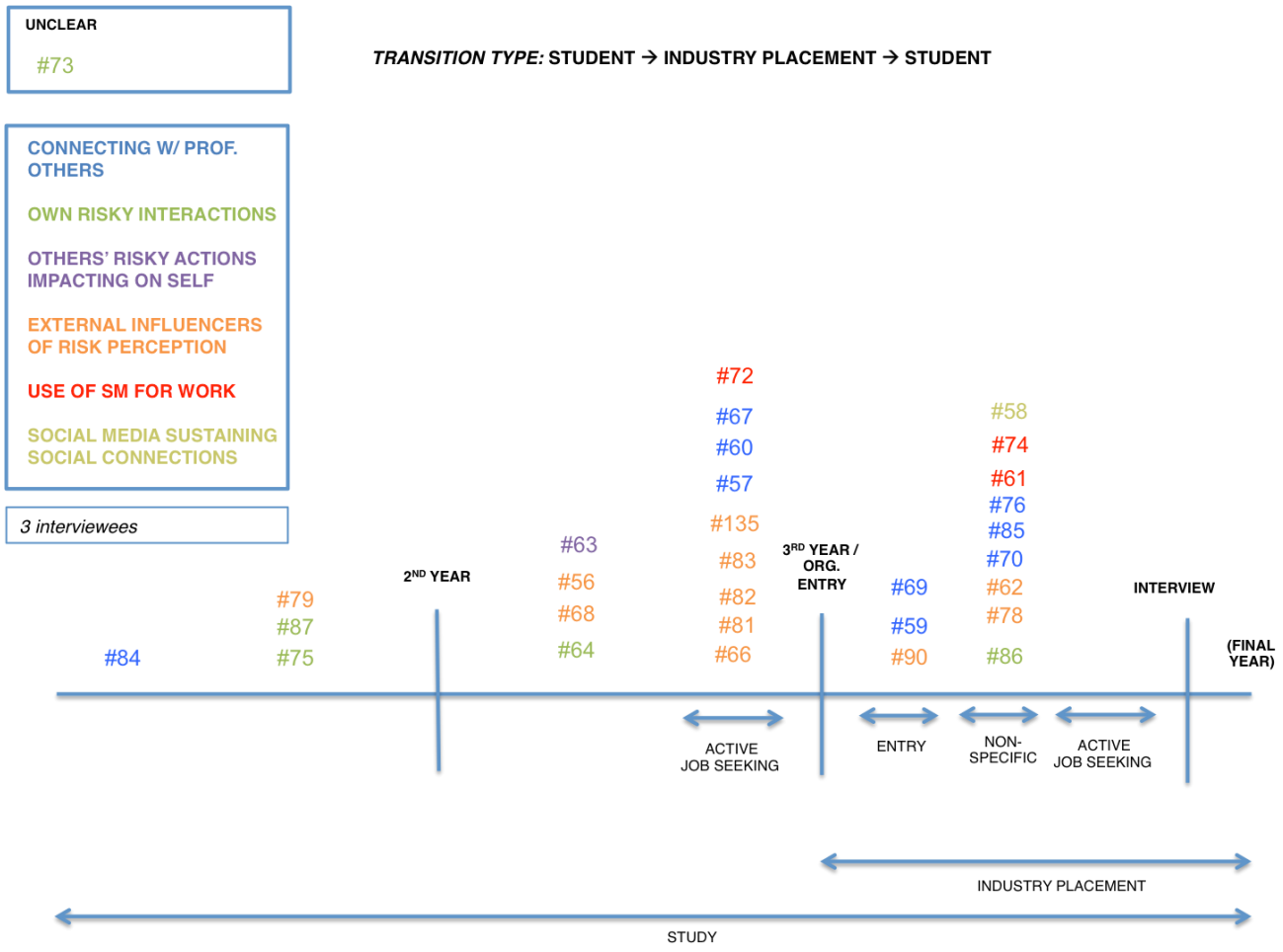
Persona:



Critical Incidents Plotted on Professional Transition Timelines




UNCLEAR
#49
CONNECTING W/ PROF. OTHERS
OWN RISKY INTERACTIONS
OTHERS' RISKY ACTIONS IMPACTING ON SELF
EXTERNAL INFLUENCERS OF RISK PERCEPTION
USE OF SM FOR WORK
SOCIAL MEDIA SUSTAINING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS
7 interviewees
TRANSITION TYPE: STUDENT → WORK EXPERIENCE → GRADUATE SCHEME
FINAL YEAR
1st ORG. ENTRY
ENTRY TO GRAD SCHEME
INTERVIEW
#53
#32
#6
#46
#45
#5
#11
#116
#133
#128
#121
#13
#12
#10
#115
#113
#1
#119
#118
#134
#9
#38
#132
#40
#7
#120
#39
#123
#15
#4
#131
#117
#18
#14
#8
#114
#130
#124
#47
ACTIVE JOB SEEKING
ENTRY PERIOD
NON-SPECIFIC
ACTIVE JOB SEEKING
ENTRY PERIOD
NON-SPECIFIC
PREPARING FOR NEXT MOVE
STUDY
PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE
GRADUATE SCHEME


UNCLEAR
#73
CONNECTING W/ PROF. OTHERS
OWN RISKY INTERACTIONS
OTHERS' RISKY ACTIONS IMPACTING ON SELF
EXTERNAL INFLUENCERS OF RISK PERCEPTION
USE OF SM FOR WORK
SOCIAL MEDIA SUSTAINING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS
3 interviewees
TRANSITION TYPE: STUDENT → INDUSTRY PLACEMENT → STUDENT
#84
#79
#87
#75
2ND YEAR
#63
#56
#68
#64
#72
#67
#60
#57
#135
#83
#82
#81
#66
3RD YEAR / ORG. ENTRY
#69
#59
#90
#58
#74
#61
#76
#85
#70
#62
#78
#86
INTERVIEW
(FINAL YEAR)
ACTIVE JOB SEEKING
ENTRY
NON-SPECIFIC
ACTIVE JOB SEEKING
INDUSTRY PLACEMENT
STUDY

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