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Understanding Personal Online Reputation Management: A Grounded Theory Study

Shuzhe Yang
Goethe University, shuzhe.yang@m-chair.de

UNDERSTANDING PERSONAL ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

Shuzhe Yang, Chair of Mobile Business & Multilateral Security, Department of Business Informatics, Goethe University, Frankfurt a. M., Germany, shuzhe.yang@m-chair.de

Abstract

In our digital and hyperconnected society, social networking sites such as Facebook or Instagram facilitated information sharing in the Web and it becomes an integral part of many people's daily life. Consequently, the amount of personal data available online is significantly increasing and concurrently, it is easy to find personal data in the Web. As a result of availability and uncomplicated retrieval of published personal data, creating comprehensive online profiles becomes effortless and also eases the derivation of implicit information for various purposes. Such information forms an online reputation and is used to make a judgment about a person (Farmer & Glass 2010). Although first studies show that individuals perceive their online reputation as important (Komisarjevsky 2012), their endeavor to manage their online reputation is on a low level (Brackenbury & Wong 2012; Madden & Smith 2010). *In order to understand why individuals consider their online reputation as important but do not take action to manage it we conducted a grounded theory based on 22 qualitative interviews with digital natives to reveal the underlying motivation. Thereby, we contribute a new facet to the general understanding of online reputation management, its obstacles, and explanations for the lack of motivation.*

Keywords: Online Reputation Management, Grounded Theory, Reputation Motivation, Social Networking Sites.

1 INTRODUCTION

Individuals in our digital and hyperconnected society no longer solely use the Internet to consume information or for online shopping (Vossen & Hagemann 2007; Quan-Haase & Wellman 2005), but they also intensively use the Internet as medium for self-presentation, relay their personal opinion to a broad audience, or as a medium to meet new people (Mehdizadeh 2010; Yang & Albers 2013; Ellison et al. 2007). More activities take place in the online world because the Internet allows people to create their desired identities with low effort, lets them act as authors and publish content without prior verification by editors, and supports them to come together at little cost (Yang & Albers 2013; Stopfer et al. 2013; Preece 2001).

Whereas the benefits of the Internet, and especially Web 2.0 platforms such as social networking sites (SNS), have been proven by their substantial success, they also generated uncertainty in the interactions among individuals. In the Internet, individuals frequently interact with others without knowing anything about them (Tennie et al. 2010). In order to overcome this uncertainty, online reputation, defined as "information used to make a value judgment about [a] [...] person" (Farmer & Glass 2010), helps as a trust anchor in the Web by being an indicator for successful collaboration, reciprocity, good quality, or selection criteria (Eisenegger & Imhof 2008; Tennie et al. 2010). Therefore, personal online reputation management (ORM) defined as any activity on any Websites (e.g. SNS, blogs, forums) for reputation building, maintenance and enhancing (Burkhardt 2008), gains significant importance because it impacts individual's professional and social life, and hence, the society as a whole (Fertik & Thompson 2010; Klewes & Wreschniok 2009; Escoffery & Bauer 2012). For example, 70% of human resource professionals have rejected job applicants based on the information they found online notwithstanding most of them have not verified the retrieved information (Cross-Tab 2010). The right to be forgotten released by the European Court of Justice underlines the importance of ORM (European Court of Justice 2014). Moreover, just being "Facebook friend" with non-creditworthy people can lead to a low credit scoring and resulting in loan or mortgage refusal (The Telegraph 2013).

While most individuals consider their online reputation as important and influential for their lives (Komisarjevsky 2012; Brackenbury & Wong 2012) existing studies show that individuals' ORM effort are on a low level (Madden & Smith 2010; Brackenbury & Wong 2012). This indicates that individuals behave paradoxical in their ORM endeavours as in their effort to protect their privacy (Barnes 2006; Norberg et al. 2007). Further, it suggests that individuals lack of motivation to conduct ORM. Current ORM research does not address this issue since the main focus is on corporate perspective (Yang & Albers 2013; Stroh et al. 2003). On the individual's side, SNS are in the focus of research endeavours and existing studies primarily investigate individual's behaviour and privacy protection strategies on SNS such as Facebook (Boyd & Ellison 2007; Smith et al. 2011; Bélanger & Crossler 2011; Yang & Albers 2013; Deuker et al. 2012). However, ORM covers a wider range of actions than merely preventing unintended information disclosure as it is often researched in scientific enquiries of privacy. For instance, it also involves individual's actions after unwanted information has already been disclosed (Fertik & Thompson 2010). Additionally, researchers from related research streams (e.g. self-presentation, impression management) demonstrated that existing theories valid in the offline world are often not applicable to the online world (Stanculescu 2011; Emanuel et al. 2014).

Therefore, in this paper, we provide a holistic investigation of motivation in personal ORM on and outside SNS. Thus, our goal is to investigate and identify the factors that drive and inhibit individual's reputation motivation, which describes individual's initial motivation to conduct ORM (Delmas & Lessem 2014; Nov et al. 2010). By doing so, we contribute to the understanding of individual's paradoxical behaviour by revealing their inner thoughts and experiences. Distinct knowledge about individual's reputation motivation would help ORM service providers, policy- and decision-makers to understand and address increasing necessity for personal ORM. Consequently, our research question is: *What drives and inhibits individuals to conduct ORM?*

In order to address the research question, we decided for an explanatory research approach because evidence from existing literature of related research domains (e.g. Acquisti & Gross 2006; Krämer & Haferkamp 2011; Barnes 2006; Stanculescu 2011) and authors' personal experiences suggest that identifying the motives of people is manifold and complex. Therefore, the grounded theory methodology was chosen. It allows us to investigate the research topic without predefined hypothesis and to include aspects and perspectives that have not yet been considered in previous literature.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of related work of this study. In Section 3, the chosen grounded theory approach is introduced and explained. Additionally, the used data collection and analysis methods are reported. Section 4 presents the main findings of the study namely the drivers, inhibitors, and contextual factors. Subsequently the results and limitations are discussed in Section 5. The paper concludes with an outlook on further research.

2 RELATED WORK

Reputation management has changed in the last decade due to the social transformation to a digital society (Halpern & Murphy 2009). Whereas personal reputation management research in the past focuses on people's appearance and their impression on others (Goffman 1959; Jones & Pittmann 1982; Leary & Kowalski 1990), current research deals with spreading information to a broader audience by using digital word-of-mouth (Dellarocas 2003), strategies for building or recovering online reputation (Tennie et al. 2010; Fertik & Thompson 2010), individual's behaviour on SNS (Spiekermann et al. 2001; Barnes 2006), and people's searching behaviour on search engines (Weerkamp et al. 2011).

Several researchers have addressed personal ORM-related topics so far. For example, Rui and Stefanone (2013b) identified people's perception of other-provided information about them and how they deal with this online reputation related information. Further it was found in the context of SNS that members with bigger network of contacts are higher motivated to conduct ORM (Rui & Stefanone 2013a). Motives for self-presentation on SNS have been investigated in various research endeavors (Yang & Tan 2012; Deuker et al. 2012; Kim et al. 2012). A multitude of researchers examined the individual's self-monitoring behavior on SNS (Emanuel et al. 2014; Hall & Pennington 2013; Hogan 2010; Stanculescu 2011) and its correlation to various personality traits (Abell & Brewer 2014; Rosenberg & Egbert 2011; Stopfer et al. 2013). Additionally, tools have been developed in order to support individual's self-monitoring endeavors on SNS (Anjomshoaa et al. 2011) or all kinds of exchanged data on the Web (D'Aquin et al. 2010). The above mentioned researches focus on SNS and do not include other websites such as blogs or forums that can also be source for online reputation.

In this study, we focus on a special aspect of ORM, the reputation motivation that individuals need to consider to conduct ORM on and outside SNS. This is motivated by the growing importance of online reputation in our digital society in which published information is hard to delete (Rosen 2012) and people's lack of motivation for ORM especially outside SNS (Madden & Smith 2010; Brackenbury & Wong 2012). For example, in Madden and Smith's (2010) sample consisting of over 2,200 people, only 33% are concerned of available information about them and are motivated for ORM. In Brackenbury and Wong's (2012) sample (5,000 people in five countries), 44% of the adults are concerned about the impact of their activities on their online reputation and taking care of their online reputation.

Based on the related work and the identified research gap in the body of knowledge of individual's motivation with regard to ORM, we aim to address the reputation motivation with this study in order to identify the relevant driving and inhibiting factors that influence individual's reputation motivation.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we aim to investigate and develop a first set of factors influencing the motivation to conduct ORM. While acknowledging the existing work with regard to individual's ORM behavior (cf.

Section 2), we aim for a deeper understanding in this matter. In order to do so, individual's inner experiences, thoughts, and motivations leading to conduct ORM need to be revealed and therefore, our data collection and analysis are oriented upon the grounded theory methodology. This allows us to investigate research topics without predefined hypothesis and to include aspects and perspectives that have not yet been considered in previous literature. For this paper, we chose the modified grounded theory method of Charmaz (2006) because of her perspective on existing knowledge in grounded theory. In contradistinction to earlier grounded theory approaches (e.g. Strauss & Corbin 2003; Glaser 1998; Glaser & Strauss 1967), she proposes a more flexible way to conduct research with grounded theory, which allows using existing knowledge from literature. This approach does not presume researchers as a *tabula rasa* (p. 165) but that every researcher already has knowledge about the research topic.

3.1 Data Collection

We conducted semi-structured and open-ended face-to-face interviews with young adults and used the collected data as primary data source. This interview method was chosen due to both its flexibility and the possibility to frame the interview at the same time. Respondent are not being interrupted in their mid-flow and the interviews can be concurrently structured based on the predefined questions. Additionally, face-to-face interviews enable better communication than other interview methods such as text or video chats. It provides more precise data since it create a more personal environment in which the interviewees speak more freely and their reaction as well as body language are visible (Bhattacherjee 2012). The sample selection strategy is based on young adults because of their long experience with using Internet services (referred to as digital natives that have greater understandings of its concepts because they interacted with digital technology from their early years on, Prensky 2001) and their connection to online reputation. Further, existing studies indicate that the share of young adults that conduct and do not conduct ORM are nearly equal (Madden & Smith 2010; Brackenbury & Wong 2012). This makes them a suitable sample for identifying drivers and inhibitors.

The aim of the study is to provide a comprehensive investigation of individual's reputation motivation in order to generate an initial set of driving and inhibiting factors from the data. 22 interviews were conducted between December 2013 and April 2014. The interviewees ranged in age from 18 to 30 years (average: 24.78), with 12 males and 10 females, and their job experiences ranged from no experience up to three years (average: 1.05). The educational background of the sample covers economy (7 interviewees), psychology (4), sociology (3), marketing (3), IT (3), art (1), and engineering (1). The interviewees were randomly acquired at the university according to the predefined conditions. Additionally, those interviewees referred us to new interviewees. In order to reduce interviewee's fear of information leakage and to let them speak as freely as possible, their privacy and anonymity were guaranteed to them at the beginning of each interview. Moreover, to avoid biased answers the interviewees were not informed about the acquisition conditions. All interviewees were German or people with a migration background but had been living in Germany for a long time.

The interviews were structured into two stages. In the first stage young adults have been interviewed that were acquired on the campus according to the previous mentioned conditions. We use this slice of data as analytical benchmark for the subsequent interviews. It comprised 12 interviews that resulted in approximately 110 single-spaced pages of transcribed text. The interview length was between 35 and 90 minutes. 10 interviews were conducted with young adults that were acquired outside the campus (referrals) in the second stage. It produced about 100 single-spaced pages of transcribed text and the interview length was at least 40 minutes. After the second round of interviews and an analysis of the data, a trend towards saturation became visible and suggested that we had collected sufficient relevant data in order to describe reputation motivation for digital natives in Germany (Guest 2006).

3.2 Data Analysis

Following the grounded theory approach, data collection and analysis were conducted in parallel. After each interview the intermediary results were analyzed and discussed. The collected insights were compared to already existing insights. Based on identified contradictions and emerging new questions, the interview guideline was extended accordingly. This cycle of constant comparison proposed by the grounded theory literature (e.g. Charmaz 2006; Strauss & Corbin 2003) enabled the identification and an in-depth understanding of the factors driving and inhibiting the motivation to conduct ORM. Additionally, constant comparison enables examination of questions from different perspectives. The process of data analysis was divided into two parts. The aim of the initial stage (open coding) was to identify concepts and high-level categories that explain or influence the motivation for starting the ORM process. Although the main focus was on the driving and inhibiting factors, we tried to remain as open as possible in order to identify concepts and relationships that were salient in the data (Charmaz 2006). At this stage all interviews were coded line-by-line and produced over 200 codes. Those codes were further integrated and abstracted into the most important core categories and the properties of the core categories. In the second step (axial coding) the main categories were further developed and elaborated. Then, the categories were separated categories with a positive influence on motivation (drivers), categories with a negative influence on motivation (inhibitors), and a category of contextual factors.

4 FINDINGS

This section presents the most influencing drivers and inhibitors for conducting personal ORM. Additionally, we noticed during data analysis that each interviewee has an individual perspective on the topic, which is also the starting point for the reputation motivation formation process. We categorized the individual perspective of the interviewees as individual context. In order to protect interviewees' privacy and anonymity all names of interviewees in this paper are pseudonyms.

4.1 Individual Context

Subjective definition of ORM: The terms online reputation and ORM have been defined in various research domains in many different ways (Eisenegger & Imhof 2008). In order to have an insight on how the interviewees define the term they were asked to explain their understanding of both terms. Our findings support the findings of Eisenegger and Imhof (2008). The definitions can be categorized:

- Interviewees relate the terms to enterprise: *"For me, it is how enterprises present themselves online, what they want to communicate to their consumers or users, and that they have a strategy for their appearance."* (Interviewee Scarlett).
- Interviewees relate the terms to individuals in private or professional life: *"My understanding refers to the image people get from me when they check me on Facebook or Twitter. The audience could be a potential employer or people I met, so management would not be posting any kind of party photos."* (Interviewee Max).
- ORM as a job: *"I would define ORM as a job or an occupation of a person."* (Interviewee Henry).

How people define ORM have an impact on their reputation motivation. The more people relate ORM to their personal sphere, the more they are willing to conduct it. The more people relate ORM to professional sphere, the less they are doing it. In order to have a common understanding as the basis for the rest of the interview, our definition of ORM (cf. Section 1) was given to the interviewees.

Perceived importance of online reputation: Perceived importance refers to an information set (which forms the online reputation) that acquires the attention of the individual (Larcker & Lessig 1980). As mentioned in Section 1, existing ORM studies indicate paradoxical behavior in individual's ORM endeavors like in related research streams (e.g. privacy paradox, Barnes 2006; Spiekermann et al. 2001). In our sample, nearly all interviewees perceive their online reputation as important:

"Nowadays, I think online reputation is very important because many contacts are established over the Internet. The online presentation of you is important, especially on sites like Xing or LinkedIn because you can find new jobs on such sites and get in contact with potential employers. I have heard from many people that they search on the Web for trainees and check them on Facebook." (Interviewee Alex).

Independent from interviewee's perceived importance about ORM, their motivation to manage their online reputation is still on a low level even though it is higher than the sample in the studies of Madden and Smith (2010) as well as Brackenbury and Wong (2012). This shows that interviewee's behavior is contradictory to their statements about the perceived importance of online reputation.

Individual experience: On an individual level people may have own negative experience or heard from friends/colleagues about bad incidents, or news from media reports. Most interviewees do not have experienced incidents such as cyber-mobbing, defamation, denunciation, or application rejection:

"Personally, I haven't had any bad experience on the Web. But a friend of mine applied for a position and his curriculum vitae didn't match to his real personality. His potential employer searched for him on Google and found his Facebook profile. They saw that that his behavior on Facebook does not fit to their corporate philosophy. The end of the story was that he was not invited for a job interview." (Interviewee Lily).

Like perceived importance of online reputation, individual experience does not directly correlate with their reputation motivation. Even people who experienced negative consequences due to not conducting ORM, often still do not conduct ORM.

4.2 Drivers

Intrinsic and extrinsic incentives: In the offline world people manage their reputation when they are visible to other people (e.g. choice of clothes) or when they interact with them (e.g. different choice of words when talking to colleagues or friends, Leary & Kowalski 1990):

"When I am with my friends I try to be more funny or do more crazy things than in my job. In the company, I just try to work professionally because I have to consider the interests of my superior. In my private life, I can do whatever I want." (Interviewee Max).

Compared to the traditional offline reputation management, people perceive ORM as much more intentional and irregularly:

- *"In real-life, I do reputation management intentionally or rather I do it online unconsciously"* (Interviewee Henry).
- *"I do online reputation management irregularly, maybe once a month."* (Interviewee Julia).

Therefore, based on these findings, incentives are a key motivator for interviewees to start conducting ORM. It turned out that incentives for conducting ORM could be of intrinsic or extrinsic nature like in many other human actions (Ryan & Deci 2000).

Intrinsic incentives arise from the individual and lead to action without any influence from third parties (Ryan & Deci 2000). The interviewees perform self-search and other ORM activities because they are interested and curious about what is online about them. In contrast to interest or curiosity, boredom was mentioned as another incentive for conducting ORM. Four of the interviewees focus on other things, but they perform ORM if they are bored.

- Interest or curiosity: *"It was rather out of curiosity because I wanted to know what kind of information about me could be found online."* (Interviewee James).
- Boredom: *"I am currently focused on my studies and I am not an expert in this field. But if I am bored, I do self-search. But I don't do it on a regular basis."* (Interviewee Julia).

The willingness to impress someone was frequently mentioned and an influencing incentive for conducting ORM. In this case interviewees see more opportunities with better online reputation. There-

fore, they use the possibilities of the Internet to improve the first impression they make on others. This can be looking for a new job or someone they may meet in the future.

- Looking for a new job: *"People upload more attractive application photos which are digitally edited. They try to present themselves from the best side and delete negative comments or photos. This can be an opportunity for them."* (Interviewee Lily).
- Impress people: *"If I want to impress someone, I would upload some adventurous photos of myself."* (Interviewee Oliver).

The motivation to conduct ORM is higher when the interviewees think their online reputation could influence the chance or risk of reaching their goals (Leary & Kowalski 1990). The interviewees do not try to fake anything in order to increase their chances, but they want to be themselves and try to align their online reputation with their real life reputation. Interviewees see risks in large discrepancy between their real life identity and their online projected image and fear prejudice and the consequences. Hence, interviewees fear misinterpretation, which is in line with existing studies (e.g. Deuker 2012). Influenced by reports of increasing cyber-bulling victims, interviewees fear to publish too much information about their private lives that could be used against them. Sharing information is not just the explicit revelation of information, but also includes the implicit revelation of interests by liking pages on SNS. However, concerns of the interviewees are not just limited to SNS. They are also worried about information shared on the public Internet that can be found by search engines as well.

- Remain genuine: *"I do not try to fake a person on the Web. I rather try to show who I am in real life."* (Interviewee Rene).
- Discrepancy between offline and online identity: *"It can be risky if you are received differently than in real life. People may pigeonhole you if they look at your online profile and you may miss interesting opportunities."* (Interviewee Scarlett).
- Fear of misinterpretation: *"In private life sharing too much information can be a risk. It bears the risk to become a cyber-bulling victim."* (Interviewee Lucy).

Some people see an advantage for doing networking in their professional or private lives if they have a strong online reputation.

- Networking: *"There is a good chance that you can meet new people if you can show them who you are."* (Interviewee Lucy).

In contrast, extrinsic incentives result from third parties like other people or an event (Ryan & Deci 2000). Interviewees said trigger events like job applications or meeting new people let them reconsider their online reputation. But they stop doing ORM after the event, which means that trigger events are a short-term incentive.

- Job application: *"I am currently in an application process and some people have prejudices and there are a lot of competitors. A bad online reputation can be a disqualifying criterion."* (Interviewee Oliver).
- Meet new people: *"When I meet someone new I check my photos on Facebook and delete some of them. I don't think that new people should see all the photos."* (Interviewee Sophie).

The difference between the intrinsic incentive "Impress people" and extrinsic incentive "Meet new people" is the stage of the interviewee. In the first case the interviewee has not applied for a job or met someone, but they are looking for something new. In the latter case the interviewee is already in the process of application or has met someone new.

Another often-mentioned extrinsic incentive arises from interaction with other people. For reputation motivation, especially on SNS, a strong incentive comes from other people's hints. Interviewees think that they cannot control and process all information on their own and they are not aware of all information published about them on the Web. In order to overcome this (perceived) information overload they rely on swarm intelligence and hope that their friends will inform them if they find anything. A similar extrinsic incentive for ORM is group dynamics. When people come together and discuss ORM-related topics, people will check their online reputation after that.

- Swarm intelligence: *"It is a kind of swarm intelligence. If someone publishes negative information about me, I will somehow notice it, whether by a friend or myself. And then I can think about further action."* (Interviewee Oliver).
- Group dynamics: *"I think we talked about that in a group and I thought it could be interesting to see what kind of information is available about me."* (Interviewee Lucy).

The third most influencing factor for reputation motivation in the category of extrinsic incentives is media reports. Recently, television stations have been broadcasting reports about privacy and data protection issues and additionally, the NSA affair have been discussed in detail. Those reports and discussions lead to a higher sensitivity of online reputation issues and results in higher ORM activities:

"Especially in ORM I feel the strong influence of reports of experts. Every time when I hear about how fast information diffuses I am shocked. When I get home, I actively recheck all my settings" (Interviewee Owen).

Most interviewees (17 of 22) also indicated that more reports and discussions about ORM-related topics would help to sensitize them and other people on current issues and create more awareness:

"I would welcome more reports. It is also important that other people are aware of this issue because a lot of people do not know how important it is to know what kind of information is available about themselves." (Interviewee Rene).

Knowledge about online reputation problems: A fundamental precondition and driver to start conducting ORM is the knowledge about existing online reputation problems such as potential misuse, uncontrollability, or fast diffusion of information on the Internet and especially on Web 2.0 platforms. The interviewees are at least partially aware of some of the problems on the Web and know that once their online reputation is damaged, it is hard to repair:

"Generally, if something is published on the Internet, it is hard to remove it. That is why people should present themselves as well as possible because you have to live with it if information about you is on the Web. It is hard to repair your online reputation, when it is damaged." (Interviewee Rene).

Interviewees with more technical skills are aware that enterprises, such as Google, can link information about an individual across different platforms. They realized that active ORM on one single Website does not mean that an enterprise cannot create a profile about you:

"Google or Yahoo know what you searched and they know on which websites you have visited and what you liked. Based on that they can create a profile of you." (Interviewee Dexter).

A few interviewees (4) have concerns about information provided by other people. They recognized the fact that other people can publish information about them without their knowledge and that such kind of information might not be in their best interest or just false information:

"For me it is fraud when other people publish false information about me because they can profit from it and harm me." (Interviewee Dexter).

Unique name: In Western countries, it is quite usual that more than one person share the same name. Consequently, those will find a lot of namesakes during self-search (Tang et al. 2011). Depending on their ORM activities or degree of fame they will appear at the top of search engine result pages or on the rear pages. Privacy sensitive people like to appear on the rear pages because they are not that easy to find. In the field of privacy research this is called privacy through obscurity (Hartzog & Stutzman 2013). In line with existing research, most interviewees with namesakes want to stay inconspicuous and like anonymity in their private lives if other people search for them. In their professional life, they like to be on the first pages because it increases their chance to get interesting opportunities:

"I find it better if results about me are on the rear results pages. I don't want people to focus on me and want to remain inconspicuous. But it depends on the context. If it is something about my job, I would like to be on the first results page." (Interviewee Dexter).

The data suggests that people with many namesakes seem to have different strategies for ORM in private and professional life. Furthermore, they conduct more ORM than people with unique names.

People with unique names cannot rely on privacy through obscurity because their names will be on the top of the first search engines results page. Since nearly all interviewees have conducted self-search at least once, most of those with unique names are more active in ORM by trying to restrict the access permission to the respective site. The resulting visibility and an eased findability from unique names is a motive for people to conduct ORM.

"I restrict the visibility of my profiles to the maximum. So people can find me, if they search for me but they cannot see anything." (Interviewee Joshua).

4.3 Inhibitors

Lack of awareness: The Oxford Online Dictionary defines awareness as "knowledge or perception of a situation or fact" (Oxford Online Dictionary 2015). The data indicates that interviewees have not considered potential consequences of being inactive in their ORM endeavors. 21 of the interviewees have conducted self-search once or twice and they guess that is enough because they did not find anything negative:

"I searched for myself once with Google and I checked some results. None of them were negative. That was enough for me and I never did it again." (Interviewee Oliver).

But if the interviewees get reminded that another person can publish information about them anytime, they recognized that self-search needs to be done on regular basis in order to be effective:

"Yes, after this interview I realize now that I should do it on a regular basis to check where my name is mentioned or if there are photos with me I don't want." (Interviewee Lucy).

19 of the interviewees said something similar after the interview. This shows that most interviewees are unaware of problems resulting from not conducting ORM on a regular basis.

The interviewees perceive self-search as time consuming because they need to scrutinize the results. If there are no new results over a period of time, they get bored and stop self-searching. None of them are aware that Internet services (e.g. Google Alerts) can automate this process and notify the respective person, if new information with their name has been published. But after they heard about these tools some interviewees wanted to use them:

"I didn't know services like Google Alerts until now. But I think I will try it after this interview because it sounds very useful." (Interviewee Oliver).

Anonymity: Content published in the Web can be anonymous. Many people use nicknames when they post in forums, personal blogs, or comments outside SNS. Nicknames increase the effort for individuals to link the nickname to the real identity of the author. Because of this, legal actions are required to identify the real person that might have published unpleasant information in order to conduct effective ORM steps. Therefore, anonymity inhibits the interviewees from starting ORM:

"On Facebook, I know who I need to contact to in order to delete some unwanted content. But outside social networks I have no idea what to do because I am facing an unknown person." (Interviewee Henry).

Lack of self-efficacy: Self-efficacy is the belief or perception of one's ability to reach a goal (Compeau & Higgins 1995). Even if the interviewees are willing to conduct ORM, they see obstacles that are hard to pass. They are unclear about the legal framework and do not know how effective this countermeasure is:

"I am unsure about the legal framework. I assume that such situations are always very unclear. I am missing a possibility to defend myself when other people post about me. And you don't have the possibility to quickly react on that." (Interviewee Lucy).

Two strategies have been mentioned (for information: the European Court of Justice's ruling about the right to be forgotten was after the interviews, European Court of Justice 2014):

- Contact author and ask for removal: *"One guy took some application photos of me and he uploaded those photos to advertise his company. I didn't like that and asked him to take down these photos. But it was really hard because he didn't want to do it in the first place. I need to be very persistent."* (Interviewee Max).
- Un-tag photos: *"I have untagged some photos because this is under my control. But I have never asked people to take down any photos."* (Interviewee Oliver).

The two strategies used by some interviewees (4) reveal that people perceive today's possibilities for ORM as very limited. Although some of them are willing to take care of their online reputation, they do not feel to be able to effectively manage their online reputation because of legal or technical issues.

Lack of usability: Usability describes "how intuitive and easy it is for individuals to learn to use and interact with a product" (Preece 2001). Nearly all interviewees (20) are members of SNS (such as Facebook or LinkedIn) and all have experience with changing privacy settings. The interviewees see privacy settings as preventive measures to protect their online reputation:

"I changed my privacy settings because I want to prevent my private data from being publicly available. So I restrict as much as I can." (Interviewee Henry).

But the interviewees are often uncertain about the correct privacy settings because they do not understand them all and there are too many individual settings. Additionally, SNS like Facebook often change their terms of conditions and privacy settings. People cannot follow the speed of the changes:

"I cannot follow the speed of condition of terms and privacy settings changes. Recently, they changed something again and I don't want to read everything again." (Interviewee Lucy).

In other words, the usability of privacy mechanisms on SNS is not good enough to be used as a permanent preventive ORM tool.

Figure 1 summarizes the findings of the study and shapes a preliminary conceptual model of individual's reputation motivation.

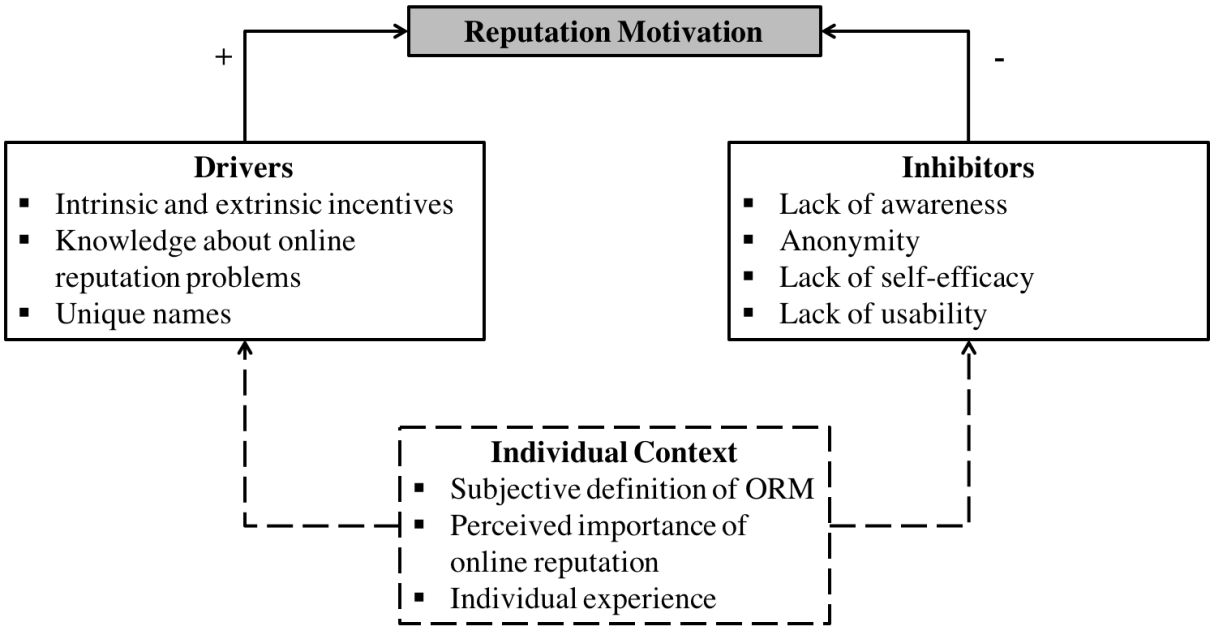

Figure 1. Preliminary Causal Model of Online Reputation Motivation.

5 DISCUSSION

During the axial coding of the interviews it turned out that the individual context is important for individual's perception of the topic ORM. Therefore, it is considered as the root of the formation of reputation motivation. The drivers and inhibitors are antecedents of reputation motivation. Drivers can be seen as amplifiers and triggers that activate the motivation to conduct reputation management and inhibitors are blockers that lower the motivation to start the ORM process.

The majority of the interviewees conduct ORM at least to a certain degree. Nearly all interviewees (20) are members of a personal SNS such as Facebook or professional SNS like LinkedIn, and at least from time to time they are taking care of their SNS profiles. All interviewees who are members of an SNS have changed at least some of their privacy settings in order to restrict the access to their profile content. Although changing privacy settings cannot be equated with ORM, interviewees consider changing privacy settings as a preventive measure. But interviewees need intrinsic or extrinsic incentives in order to see the necessity for conducting ORM. Such kinds of incentives, summarized in the category "drivers" (cp. Section 4.2), are one-time incentives. After the interviewee has reached his/her goal, the incentive disappears and the interviewee stops conducting ORM. Consequently, the finding suggests that intrinsic or extrinsic incentives are short-term and do not last long enough for regular ORM. This type of motivation and encouragement can be risky for the individual (Fertik & Thompson 2010). Removing personal content online can be time consuming. Also the actual success of the attempt is uncertain. In the worst case individuals need to take legal action, which takes even more time and might create also monetary costs. Sometimes the author of the content is also unknown, which makes ORM efforts even harder (Yang & Albers 2013). To summarize, current intrinsic and extrinsic incentives trigger one time ORM action that are often performed before important events, but they are not strong enough for individuals to conduct ORM on regular basis.

One key factor for missing motivation arise due to a lack of awareness for negative consequences associated to a potential damage of online reputation. The interviewees are at least to some degree aware about these potential damages to their online reputation. However, this level of awareness is often not high enough to motivate individuals to take care of ORM for a longer period or to invest in more resources. When the interviewees get reminded of this topic they start thinking about this issue and are motivated to check it again. But if they do not find new information about themselves, they lose their motivation and stop conducting ORM (cp. Section 4.3). However, new information about a person can be published anytime and especially negative information diffuses very fast. Shit-storms are a good example for slow response to negative information (e.g. Hauck & Paukner 2012) showing the negative side of group dynamics and fast information diffusion.

19 out of 22 interviewees admitted that they have never reflected closely about online reputation and its impact before this interview, and nearly all interviewees (21) expressed their intention to check their search results after the interview. Moreover, a few interviewees (4) admitted that they are aware of the importance and that they should take care of it but they often push this thought away if other tasks are pending. This might be the biggest obstacle to overcome. Many interviewees (18) do not have personal experience with negative information published about them online and they have not heard bad incidents from friends or colleagues. It seems that second-hand experience is not enough to raise the awareness to a level to which individuals are willing to invest more resources. They seem to need self-experience in order to increase their awareness and thus, their reputation motivation. One possible solution could be to promote search engine alert systems that automatically inform people about new results. Most interviewees have not heard about such services or they do not relate such systems with personal ORM.

The interviewees (4) who have experience with ORM indicated some kind of frustration. They do not know what to do even if they find information about them. Most people seem not to have the ability or knowledge to conduct effective ORM. Some stated that it was hard to remove the content from the Web because they needed to be very persistent in their removal requests. The interviewees wish for

more usable tools to remove unwanted content. Some interviewees argued that they went through the whole ORM process in their mind and they realized how hard it would be to remove content from the Web and then decided to stay passive. This may change with the right to be forgotten, which was promulgated in May 2014 (European Court of Justice 2014). The new court ruling of the European Court of Justice states that Google is obligated to provide the right to be forgotten to people, which means that people have the right to exclude search results about themselves from the results page (European Court of Justice 2014). Privacy advocates see this court ruling as a big step towards more privacy and empowering the individual with more informational self-determination. But, this law only removes the link to the content, whereas the real content is still available. Using foreign countries' top-level domain of a search engine or another search engine circumvents this regulation and makes it ineffective. Furthermore, it remains to be proven whether the right to be forgotten is really a contribution to more privacy or if it is a weakening of the freedom of speech (Rosen 2012). Therefore, the future will show if the right to be forgotten is an effective tool for individuals to defend their online reputation or if criminals will misuse it to hide their true identity.

The findings of this grounded theory study revealed the differences of ORM to traditional offline theories such as impression management. Impression motivation based on Leary and Kowalski (1990) comprises three factors, namely "goal-relevance of impressions", "value of desired goals", and "discrepancy between desired and current image". Such factors have also an influence on the reputation motivation in the online world. The driver "internal and external incentives" is comparable to "Goal-relevance of impressions". The contextual factor "perceived importance of online reputation" can be matched with "value of desired goals" and the driver "intrinsic and extrinsic incentives" includes "discrepancy between desired and current image". But in the two-component model of Leary and Kowalski all factors have a positive influence on the impression motivation. The collected data of this study reveals that "perceived importance of online reputation" does not have a clear influence on the motivation of individuals. Even though most interviewees find online reputation important, they often do not actively take care of it. This finding correlates with related work of privacy research enquiries that named this phenomena as privacy paradox (Barnes 2006; Spiekermann et al. 2001). We conclude based on this findings and existing work that the inhibitors dominate the drivers and let individuals stay passive notwithstanding they acknowledge the impact of online reputation on their lives. Consequently, ORM service providers, policy- and law-makers have to provide more suitable options and tools to individuals in order to overcome the inhibitors.

The drivers "knowledge about online reputation problems" and "unique names" arise from the characteristics of the Internet and are not in the theories dealing with the offline world (e.g. Leary & Kowalski 1990). On the Web people can create fake identities with fake attributes and publish false information about themselves and others (Mukherjee et al. 2012; Lau et al. 2010). Moreover, people can easily share any kind of information about a person and information diffuses very fast (Yang & Albers 2013). Further, information on the Internet is hard to delete and therefore, mistakes in the past that are saved in the Web can be found by others and it directly influences the present online reputation (Rosen 2012). The origin of the inhibitors seems to be in the characteristics of the Internet, too. Those findings extend former theories from the offline world. The anonymity of the Internet gives people the feeling that they cannot conduct effective ORM. The interviewees also stated that they do not know how to conduct ORM because they lack the knowledge and abilities (cf. Lack of self-efficacy). Those who tried to conduct ORM miss the usability in the current ORM solutions. Those inhibitors originate in the design of the Internet and are not existent in the theories built for the offline world (e.g. Leary & Kowalski 1990). Although the Internet has been integrated in our daily lives and more and more interactions happen progressively more in the online world, there seems to be gaps in current solutions that hinder people to start managing their reputation.

This paper is limited by the set of drivers and inhibitors only valid for a specific group of digital natives in Germany due to the sample selection. In another setting the factors may vary because of domestic regulations such as censorship. Additionally, personal characteristics such as attitude or perception play key roles in causal explanations. Furthermore, cultural background may have a strong impact

on individuals' reputation management behavior. For instance, the definition of reputation in Asia is different and more influenced by their culture (Ho 1976). A loss of face, which is also a loss of reputation, causes more personal shame and leads to lower social status than in Western countries (Hwang 1987). Active Internet users who are not digital natives may have the same issues, but their set of drivers and inhibitors might be different. Also their individual context may vary because they did not grow up with digital technology and it is not an integral part of their lives.

6 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Understanding individuals' reputation motivation for ORM is complex and manifold. Currently, individuals tend to conduct incentive-based ORM that is not effective and risky at the same time. The impact of inhibitors is currently higher than the drivers especially for long-term ORM. Overcoming the inhibitors would empower individuals and give them the control over their information. However, individuals do not have tools to effectively manage their online reputation. The European Court of Justice's attempt to provide individuals with a powerful tool in form of the right to be forgotten and the ruling could be a solution. But the effect of this law is currently still unclear and its effectiveness will be revealed in the future. Google received 12,000 removal requests, which could be the first indicator that people become more motivated if they have the right tools (Anon 2014). However, short and informal re-interviews with some interviewees revealed that the right to be forgotten has not reached the broader population in Germany.

The findings provide an insight into individuals' reputation motivation and they provide an empirical as well as theoretical baseline to improve current research and ORM solutions. Moreover, the results may help researchers, policy-makers, and companies to better understand how individuals become motivated to conduct ORM and how to help them to ease their ORM endeavors. For instance, they could invest in research on machine learning, artificial intelligence, or Semantic Web (Web 3.0) in order to provide simple and effective tools to individuals. Nevertheless, individuals need to change their way of thinking. As human resource professionals already predicted, the value of online reputation will increase in the coming years and consequently it will affect our lives more than ever (Cross-Tab 2010). People need to realize the importance of their online reputation and moreover, they should start take control over their own online reputation before somebody else does (Escoffery & Bauer 2012).

While acknowledging the limitations of this study, the grounded theory approach of Charmaz enabled substantial and innovative insights. This model is the first set of reputation motivation factors and it can be used as a baseline for further qualitative studies with a different sample selection. In order to challenge and ground the findings of this paper more data is required because the proposed reputation motivation model needs further elaboration on generalizability. It can be the starting point for quantitative analysis on individuals' reputation motivation. Additionally, it needs further specification in order to be transferred into constructs, propositions, testable hypotheses, or design guidelines. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative types of research are opportunities for further understanding.

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