

# THE DIGITALIZATION OF REPUTATION

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# The new brave world of work

Trends in workplace (Castells, 1996; Van Mannen 1984, Barley and Kunda, 2004):

- Focus of the economic activity: the individual
- Labour loses its collective identity
- Highly-skilled workers operate outside the framework of traditional employment arrangements

Unit of analysis of the current study:

- 'IT experts' in flexible forms of employment

# Focus of the study

- The concept of reputation in literature
  - ▣ status theory in **sociology** (Shrum and Wuthnow, 1988),
  - ▣ resource-based view of the firm in **strategy** (Hall, 1992)
  - ▣ game theory in **economics** (Weigelt and Camerer, 1988)
  - ▣ Communities of practice, design theory in **information systems** (Brown and Duguid 1991, Dellarocas, 2005; Fan et al. 2005; Wasko and Faraj, 2005)
- Focus of the current study: the *affordances of technology* that are implicated in the constitution of IT experts-contractor's **digital reputation** in the web.

# The concept of reputation../1

A person's reputation or image (Bromley, 2001; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Ferris et al., 2003; Mahon, 2002).

- is described as *the collective opinion of others various publics toward this individual.*
- This opinion is *formed and updated along time through interactions*

It has been assessed in terms of

- *Relative standing* - status comparisons
- *Quality*
- *Favourableness*
- *Image, Esteem, Prestige, & Goodwill*



# The concept of reputation../2

- 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 behavior, 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 (Zinko et al. 2003, p.4)

# Reputation and possibilities of employability

Reputation: passport to **possibilities** of employability

a) Visibility/awareness 

b) Trustworthiness

the way the space of possibilities is created is challenged

# Visibility and traceability

The possibilities of easy and cost-efficient **connectivity** among geographically dispersed agents created:

- more **visible** than ever before to a dynamically increasing pool of peers and prospective clients.
  - Within a few minutes, rumours or facts concerning the IT contractor's conduct could circulate within the interconnected communities of cyberspace and reach audiences of unprecedented scale.

*Visibility vs information overload > relative standing*

The possibilities of **recording and storing**:

- **'Panopticon-like'** structures of surveillance and control
  - more **traceable** than ever before

# Openness and multiplicity of actors

Many authors of the 'electronic reputation'

- A combination of quite heterogeneous/scattered bits and pieces by various agents not necessarily belonging to common networks

*Empowerment or weakening?*

- exposure to the judgemental views or comments of virtual peers/clients which reside in the web and do not fade over time
- Not spontaneous. Think of it thoroughly and craft it strategically > manipulate and induce

# Tackling with ambiguity/information interpretation../1

- The veil of ambiguity related to the conventional word-of-mouth networks and the temporal character of the oral discourse, is lifted to some extent in the virtual environment.
  - ▣ In contrast to the oral (context-rich) cues and the short-lived nature of information they carry, digital cues:
    - are there to be discovered and double-checked
    - are not subject to distortions due to lack of memory or to misinterpretations occurring as words travel across time and among people.

# Tackling with ambiguity/information interpretation../2

- the disembodied nature of on-line environments brings about shifts in the way perceive and interpret information.
  - ▣ The relative absence of contextual cues →
    - meaning of the information,
    - the subjective/objective weight of the information provided in the internet
  - ▣ Plethora of alternative informational sources → how should we verify the **reliability** of information?
    - Contextual cues (quality) vs. Number of 'likes' or 'reviews' or rate of response and viral effects
    - Immediacy of face2face interactions/lived experience vs. Carefully crafted 'non-real-time' interaction

# Digitalized reputation

Although the building blocks of reputation remain the same, when they are transferred online, they acquire multidimensional effects. –they generate *possibilities of 'doing things differently'* that did not exist before.

Poets (and PR professionals) agree that reputation is a mighty thing, worthy of nurture, deserving of praise. And once lost -- or even tarnished -- incredibly difficult to regain (Winkleman, 1999).



**THANK YOU!!**