# My Favorite Unreliable Source? Inform and Acquisition Through Informal Netw

**Rebekah Willson**
McGill University
Montreal, Canada
rebekah.willson@mcgill.ca

**George Buchanan**
University of Melbourne
Melbourne, Australia
george.buchanan@unimelb.edu.au

**Nicole Ellison**
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, USA
enicole@umich.edu

**Sanda Erdelez**
Simmons University
Boston, USA
sanda.erdelez@simmons.edu

## ABSTRACT

Informal information networks are the personal connections of friends, people use to help them find information. Recently, a great deal of atten network sites, and other social media, as a key source of informati contemporary society. This panel will probe deeper, to investigate the underpin and lie behind the social connections visible on social network sit importance as more of our everyday lives are moved online. We will del and do not know, about how people find information through others, bot panel we hope to create a network of scholars interested in creating a resea networks a focus of study going forward.

## INTRODUCTION

While a lot of attention has been paid to the explosion of information sourc last two decades, research continues to demonstrate that other people rema source (e.g. Cross & Sproull, 2004; Hertzum, 2014; Miller, 2015; Will people connect to one another and share information continues to be of technologies and digital platforms there are new, and ever increasing, way

This panel will explore the various ways in which information is acquired

endeavour" (Wenger, cited in Smith, 2003/2009) that share a domain of
practice (Smith, 2003/2009). While communities of practice can be inf
shared domain of interest and a practice distinguish it from an informal
Informal networks are also related to the strength of weak ties (Granov
potential of weak ties (acquaintances and contacts) to expand the rang
available to individuals beyond their familiar networks, and bridge social

Within informal networks, information can be acquired in many differe
seeking information by asking questions (e.g., Willson & Given, 2020), s
information through informal interactions (e.g., Erdelez & Makri, 2020), vi
in which the main activity is not sharing information but is a situation in w
be shared (e.g., Fisher et al., 2007), or receiving information through th
(receiving information by proxy) (e.g., McKenzie, 2003). Environment
encountered can be physical (e.g., homes, schools, stores, libraries, cafes
engines, digital libraries, social media) (Jiang et al., 2019). However, there
of social network sites and other social media on informal networks. I
information, and a high proportion of social network site activity is abo
(Morris, Teevan, & Panovich, 2010). In terms of information, the best e
proportion is spread through social network site posts (Buchanan et al.,
Buchanan, 2016), with in-person and private digital communication l
proportion of exchange. Furthermore, building new relationships online is
that in social network sites, discussion boards or other forms of social r
Lampe, 2007; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). This discussion is pa
current shift toward more and more of everyday life moving online.

Informal networks can become particularly important for individuals w
groups and who experience information poverty (Chatman, 1996) or who ha
capital (an individual's capacity to access information) (Counts & Fisher,
norms and attitudes facilitate (or determine) the ways in which community
Jaeger, & Thompson, 2008). For marginalized groups, stigma complicates
can include behaviors such as hiding information resources to avoid negati
2013). While current research has focused on mainstream informati
understanding of how the

- Each of the panelists will provide a five-minute overview of their
networks, describe a key contribution where this research contribu
the topic, and ending by proposing a pivotal question (or question
answered (35 minutes total, including 5 minutes for handover);
- Each member of the audience will receive a postcard when enterin
(1-4), a short scenario, and 2-3 discussion questions (related to the
Based on the number on their postcards, audience members will fo
panelist, to discuss the scenario and begin to answer the discussio
time for the small group discussion, the entire audience will reflec
opportunities, and possible next steps with research into informal
sessions of 15 minutes, plus a 5-minute recap between the session
- The Moderator will close the session by reviewing the topics that
panelists' presentations and the dialogue from the small group dis
ideas for establishing a network of scholars and a research agenda
a topic of future research  (15 minutes).

## PANELISTS

### *George Buchanan*

George Buchanan is an Associate Professor and Director of the University
research focuses on developing novel technologies to support the disco
information, though constructing models of users' information behavior
science. He has published over 150 articles, and introduced a number of k
information work, including the collapsible outline used in many contemp

George's talk will focus on his research into informal information networ
and of patients with a variety of medical conditions, including HIV. He is c
of human information behavior in informal networks that synthesizes these
of the spread of misinformation in marginalized groups. There are e
proliferation of misinformation and cognitive factors that are found in info

### *Gary Burnett*

Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul, South Korea, and in 2016-2017, h
universities throughout Asia.

Drawing on both his work with theory and earlier work on online commu
the information world's concepts of social norms and information value, e
in informal information networks. Together, social norms (the shared sens
in observable behaviors within a world) and information value (shared per
information are of value and about the appropriate ways of evaluating and
influence what kinds of information are typically exchanged throughout a
is structured and represented, and the patterns and practices by means of v
through a world. Information networks are specific to specific informati
values, information, and social interaction are inextricably intertwined,
character and characteristic "feel."

### Nicole Ellison

Nicole Ellison is the Karl E Weick Collegiate Professor in the Universi
Information. Prof. Ellison is internationally recognized as an expert in soc
sites, and has published extensively on how people use social media as a
research has investigated how new digital platforms shape personal com
which they are adopted and exploited by users to maintain their social r
research is strongly influenced by her training in communication theory a
communication technologies.

In this panel, Nicole will discuss the transmission of information in onlin
we know of the strengths and limitations of in-person and virtual commun
degree to which social network sites reflect established behavior in co
technologies shape, and are shaped by, the social structures that underpin

### Sanda Erdelez

Dr. Sanda Erdelez is a Professor and Director at Simmons University Scho
Science. She received her LL.B. and LL.M degrees from the University of
and Ph.D. in information transfer from Syracuse University. Her resea
information behavior, human-computer interaction and usability evaluatio

ability to discover useful ideas. In contrast to intentional mechanisms, ther
and unintended acquisition of information, and social contexts serve to
multiple ways.

### *Mike Twidale*

Michael Twidale is a Professor in the School of Information Sciences, Uni
Champaign, and was the founding director of the Master of Science in In
research interests are at the intersection of computer supported cooperativ
collaborative learning, human computer interaction, and sociotechnic
projects include studies of informal social learning of technology, t
collaborative approaches to managing data quality, collaborative infor
learning and problem solving activities at the intersection of search, le
interested in how people informally learn new technologies and new featu
how they succeed, fail, struggle, tinker, help their friends and try to search

Mike will contribute to the panel by discussing the collaborative na
knowledge. He will highlight the degree to which supposedly new behav
already established offline, and the impact that groups have always on the
refined and communicated. Prof. Twidale will also touch on the ways
performs poorly as a means for learning, by impeding group interaction,
previous research has already drawn attention to.

### *Rebekah Willson*

Rebekah (Becky) Willson, PhD, is an assistant professor at McGill Univer
Studies. She is in the field of information behavior/information practices
contexts of higher education and workplaces. Her research focuses
transitions, particularly early career academics and adjunct faculty mer
research is examining the influence precarity and marginalization have o
information access. She is actively involved in the information behavior a
an Editor for *JASIS&T*, the Chair of SIG-USE (Use, Seeking, and Needs), a
of the Research Engagement Committee.

In this panel, Rebekah will discuss factors that facilitate information exch

within a new context. Information shared within an informal network freq
and is "insider" information that is frequently not recorded nor available t

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