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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Okay. And we can get started at last. Sorry about all of that.

Meera: That’s fine.

Interviewer: So, in your book, one of the things we’ve sent you is the times of day that you have shared news with us. So, I just wanted to ask, does this accurately, you think, reflect the times of day you generally interact with news, and could you just maybe give a bit more detail about the way you interact with news throughout the day?

Meera: Yes, I think that’s pretty accurate. Because when I check the news, usually in the morning, it’s when I’m travelling to work. I’m usually, like, the Google setting on my phone gives me notifications of some kinds of news that I’m interested in, that’s what I usually go through first. And then if there’s anything else on LinkedIn, or any other social media will bring up, then I might do some research about it. That’s on my way to work.

And then sometimes it’s maybe during my lunch hour, if I’m on my phone, I’ll look through some news. And then it’s mostly in the evenings, which is after work, when I’m either cooking food, or, just, you know, out and about, or when I’m eating food, is when I get to see a couple of things, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, continuing to think about that, have you noticed any patterns or trends in your news consumption over time? So, have you noticed, you know, you consumed more or less news, perhaps, over time?

Meera: It depends on how busy I am on a particular day, and what other kind of work do I have during a particular day, so then accordingly, it, kind of, affects my news consumption. So, maybe during the mornings, it would be a lot more than how much it would be during the afternoons or during the night.

Interviewer: Okay. And do you typically read just the headlines of news articles? Or do you spend- or, read them really kind of quickly, scanning them? Or do you tend to read things really thoroughly?

Meera: So, it depends. So, I usually read the news headlines, and then if there’s anything that I particularly find really interesting, then I’ll go on and read the entire article. And then if they asked me, I would share it, or like it, or tell people about it, or recommend it, and things like that. But it depends if I find the article interesting, that’s on the basis of what the headline says.

Interviewer: Okay. And what sorts of things, then, might you find interesting? Like, if you think back to just these two weeks of the study, what sorts of things did you particularly think, “Oh, I’ll read beyond the headline of these, kind of, topics”?

Meera: There were things about, like, healthcare and mental health that were going on at that time. A lot of the news articles that I went through was also about technology and environment, because at that time, even now, I’m actually, like, trying to read more about AI technology, and on, like, separately, about the environment as well.

Interviewer: Okay, great. And then, so, yes, and then in your booklet, it shows those exact topics that you’ve just described. Why is it, do you think, that you gravitate towards those issues in particular at the moment?

Meera: I mean, currently, I think it’s because those are the topics that I’m interested in. That’s what I’m reading about, that’s what’s been recommended to me. And, you know, I feel like it’s like Google, the more you read about a particular news, the more you’re recommended similar news. I’m reading about AI and tech, that’s what’s being recommended to me more. So, I just continue reading about the things. If there’s something else that I want to read, then I look for those things on LinkedIn, or sometimes even Google it, and then I get more news about it.

Interviewer: Okay, so, do you tend to, kind of, use LinkedIn in that way, to find interesting things?

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, how often do you think you encounter online information or news that you think is in some way misleading, or maybe fake?

Meera: I think most of that encounter could be online. Social media platforms like Facebook. That’s the only platform that I think really gives me, like, fake news. You know, when I’m scrolling through Facebook, I’ll see a tonne of news stories that I know would be definitely fake. I don’t really follow a lot of news places on any other social media. Like, Instagram, so, Instagram, I only follow one news channel that gives me information, so I trust it pretty much, so I feel safe discussing it with others.

But I think the news articles that Google usually gives me are from authentic websites, so I never worry that they’re providing me with fake news. And if I ever am, then I always just Google more information, and see if there is anything that’s actually true, or just false information.

Interviewer: Okay. So, I think we’ll come back to- okay, yes, so, you mentioned that you, kind of, rely on certain news sources in places like Instagram.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: And you think that when Google recommends you stories, that tends to be from things that you already are familiar with and you trust?

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: But you also touched on seeing things on Facebook that you’re perhaps more suspicious of. So, could you talk more about that? I mean, have you ever, when you’ve read something online, intentionally tried to find an alternative perspective, or a different source?

Meera: I think that usually happens when I read something on Facebook, then I have to go onto Google and verify it, because I’m really untrusting of fake news from random websites, or random accounts on Facebook, just giving me random news, and I have to Google Facebook- go onto Google and verify it by just searching it. And most of the time, it turns out to be false.

Interviewer: Okay. So, how often would you say, like, say, per week, on average, would you do something like that?

Meera: Two or three times. It’s not that often.

Interviewer: Okay. So, like, three times per week?

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: And what would, kind of, motivate you to do that? What might it be about the story that gives you suspicion, rather than just accepting it?

Meera: Just, you know, depends on what, like, what news source it comes from. So, what website is it from, or what the comments are on it.

Interviewer: So, more about the source, there’ll be certain sources you trust, and certain sources you don’t trust.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: And if it’s from a source you don’t trust, you might then Google further…

Meera: I’ll go to Google and verify it, yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, when you do, kind of, verify a piece of information you see in the news, have you ever used specific fact-checking websites or services?

Meera: No, not really. I just use Google, and then if I see there’s similar news from website that I trust, or from, like, a news source that I’ve read the article from before, read an article from before then, then I just go along with that, and read more about it, rather than- because, I mean, I give importance to news, but it’s not that- like, for me, if I know it’s from Facebook and it’s going to be fake news, then I just look it up on Google. If I don’t find anything, then I’m sure that it’s fake.

Interviewer: Okay, so if there’s nothing else about it, if you, kind of, reach a dead end, that’s when you would think it was fake, and you would stop then?

Meera: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: Okay. So, the book also shows different, kind of, actions that you reported doing. So, it says about half the time, you just do nothing. But you do quite a lot react or share news stories.

Meera: Hmmhmm, yes.

Interviewer: So, could you talk a little more about that? What things do you tend to react to? What things do you tend to share? Who do you share with?

Meera: So, it’s usually, like, when it comes to sharing things, it’s usually things like are related to healthcare or technology, or mental health. So, if it’s about mental health, I’d share it with my friends, who work in the same field with me. If it’s about tech, then I’ll share it with my brother and my family, and ask them about it, have a discussion with them. Yes, it just depends, you know, who’s interested in what.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. So, could you talk a bit more about that? I guess, could you say what factors would you consider before you decide to share something? So, what would it be about that information you’d think, “Oh, this is something I need to share”?

Meera: To me, I think it’s just, like, it’s just about how important the news is, and how relevant it is to today’s- like, what’s going on to these days, and how trustworthy, you know, the information is, that people are asking to read more about it, or finding it interesting, and that makes me want to share it.

Interviewer: Okay. And are there certain people you share news with a lot? Like, maybe some members of family, or certain friends? And how might you choose who to share what with? Are you talking about this one big WhatsApp group where you share with everyone? Or…?

Meera: No, no. It depends on particular interests. Like, I have some people that I work with, or like my friends from uni, who we, I like to share with news with them about mental health, and healthcare, and the care abroad, like, international. And my brother’s more, like, a technology, computer science, AI person, so I tend to share that with him, and my dad as well. So, it just depends on the group of people who would be interested in it.

Interviewer: Okay. So, if you are going to share an article on social media, or in messaging apps, would you always do some kind of fact checking or verification first, before you share it?

Meera: No, not really. I usually just- I mean, again, if it’s on a trustworthy website, then I just share it, because I find it interesting and it was recommended to me. But that’s pretty much all I do.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. So, you are doing that, kind of, fact checking, but it’s just at the level of, “Which source is it from? That’s a trustworthy source.”

Meera: Yes, yes, exactly.

Interviewer: Okay. So, have you ever, can you think of a time that you have shared something and it then turned out to be false or misleading?

Meera: No, I can’t really remember a time like that, to be honest.

Interviewer: No? That’s fine.

Have you ever changed your mind about any kind of issue or topic based on something that you’ve read as an online news story?

Meera: Yes, I think- I mean, especially with, like, how the current healthcare situation is going on in the UK, with all the strikes and the campaigning from the doctors and other teams, I think a lot of the people that I’m working with had a very negative opinion about it, about how they were not doing anything, how the government were not doing anything.

But I did read a couple of news articles about what the government is trying to do. And then I read the article from the prime minister himself, that said that he was bringing about these so and so changes, different things, and giving a pay rise. So, that improved my perception of how government takes care of these things. You know, kind of, like, understanding it’s a process, and people can’t just expect big changes in a day.

So, it’s just, the news, actually, sort of, helped me look at it in a more positive way, rather than just listening to what people were saying.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you talked about listening to what other people were saying. Do you ever discuss news, or things you’ve read online, with friends or family members?

Meera: Yes, sometimes, if it’s something really interesting, then I’ll talk to my friends about it. If it’s something that’s relevant to what my parents do, or to what my brother does, then I’ll discuss it with them. Even if it’s something, if it’s government news, I’ll discuss it with my mum. That this is happening, you know, this is happening in the UK, this is going on. And then, like, I have their opinion about it as well.

Interviewer: Okay. So, how would you say those conversations tend to go? Would this be something that you often bring up to get people’s opinion on, like you said? Or do you ever bring up topics that you might have disagreements with family or friends about, perhaps, or different opinions about?

Meera: It’s a mix of both, so it depends. Like, sometimes I bring up a topic just to share what I’ve found with other people, and see what they think about it, and what their thoughts are on it. And sometimes it’s also about seeing if they disagree.

Because, like, some of my family members can have really strong opinions about things, so it sometimes is really interesting to talk to them about things, and hear their side of things, even if it leads to disagreement. For me, it’s more about this, you know, being willing to listen to what other people’s ideas are.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. And I think, so, do you ever, in those conversations, perhaps, feel like you need to challenge other people’s opinions, or are you open to having your opinion challenged?

Meera: No, I’m open to having a discussion. But- and I’m open to having my opinion challenged as well, as long as people are able to provide me with a proper explanation as to what their side of things is. I wouldn’t just listen to someone, and then let them change my opinion, and then, you know, I would even go back and do my own research, to know for sure that what that person has said is not just hokey, and it actually makes sense, and it’s true, and things like that.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you know, doing this kind of research, are there certain places- maybe this is just Google too, but are there certain places you’d always go to, to be, like, the…

Meera: No, it’s just Google. It’s usually just a Google search that I do.

Interviewer: Okay. So, in your book, I can see that there are some of the most frequent places that you got news from during this study, and the top ones were the Guardian and the BBC.

Meera: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: So, do you think that’s a fair reflection of overall? Do you think there are certain news sources that you rely on more than others? And has this perhaps changed over time?

Meera: Possibly. I mean, depends, you know, it also depends on what culture, or what [ \_\_\_ 0:16:22] location I’m in. Like, if I’m back home, then I’ll look at news sources that I depend on and I trust back home. If I’m in the UK, then I’ll look at news sources that people have recommended to me, because these are trustworthy, and I’ll do my own research on it. And then that’s how, you know, these are a couple of ones that I use, that were recommended to me, because I’ve been reading them for a while. So, I just continue on doing the same.

Interviewer: Okay. So, if you travel from different locations, you’ll tend to have more, kind of, local sources of news, depending on where you are?

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, about half of the news that you shared with us during the study was from social media.

Meera: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: So, how do you feel about the role of social media in disseminating news and information, and does this affect the way you trust information?

Meera: I think there was a time when it was really untrustworthy, and everyone was having issues with how you would, you know, take on news from social media. But I think in the last year or so, it’s gone, like, a lot better. You know, and there’s always ways to control some news that you’ve seen, and clarify that it was actually true, and you did not get fake news.

So, you know, it’s made it easier, just, you know, using social media for information and for news.

Interviewer: Okay. So, you said that you think social media was in the past less trustworthy for news, but more recently has become more trustworthy? What change, do you think, has happened, that gives you that idea?

Meera: I think it’s just, like, the idea of, you know, the news, like, all the issues that happened, and before the pandemic, around the time of the pandemic, of having a lot of disinformation around news, and now that’s being improved by social media platforms themselves. I think that’s what’s making it better.

Interviewer: Okay. Like, just to help me understand that, could you, kind of, give an example of where you think social media companies have had that impact?

Meera: Like, there’s definitely, like, it’s Facebook and Instagram that I think- I mean, you still get, like, disinformation and fake news on it, but it’s about, like, you know, being able to verify that it’s trustworthy information. And it’s also the sources, like, the news sources that I look at. Like, you know, that [ \_\_\_ 0:19:29] I don’t randomly look at any news sources. Only look at the ones that I follow, and I know that those are going to be trustworthy.

Interviewer: Okay. So, it’s less what the social media companies have changed. It’s more the way you use social media has changed, is that right?

Meera: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: And was there anything- I mean, you mentioned the pandemic. Was there anything in particular that made you change the way that you use social media?

Meera: I think it was more about, like, the bad news that I was receiving. About, like, the disinformation that was circulating on these Facebook channels, and that made me want to change the way that I get my news information, and refer the sources for that information.

Interviewer: Okay. So, in particular during the pandemic, if I understand rightly, you were seeing a lot more information that you considered fake and untrustworthy.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: And your response was to, I guess, change the way that you interact with social media?

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Essentially start ignoring some parts of social media that you didn’t feel were good places to get information.

Meera: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: Okay. I mean, did you ever, during that time, sort of, challenge things people were saying in these groups? Or ever provide…

Meera: No, no. So, I shared with people I know. I don’t normally engage with people- like, a wider audience. Because I’m not much of a social person, I don’t like to get into, like- because I could have different opinions to some other people, but I don’t really want to have my opinions challenged by people I don’t know, and just random exchanges on the internet.

Because I think that’s just pointless. Because sometimes people are right, but a lot of the time people are just- you know, they’re just saying things, because they- for whatever reason, you know?

Interviewer: Hmmhmm.

Meera: So, it’s just about, you know, I’m okay with having these conversations with people I know and I trust, and I know they won’t just be flinging shit at me, but I would never do it on social media.

Interviewer: Yes. I can completely understand that. So, you’ve talked about it a bit, but how important is it to you that news comes from a trusted source? And just to follow up on that, how do you work out if a source is trustworthy?

Meera: It is very important that the news I read comes from a trusted source. So, I make sure that most of the time if you look at that, because [ \_\_\_ 0:22:22] are from certain particular, like, news sites as well, and then I trust, for whatever reason – I don’t really know yet, maybe I’ll figure it out – but I don’t trust LinkedIn for news, because I see that, like, a lot of the people who I follow are the people who are, like, connected with, have read similar news. And if someone had something to say against it, I would have seen a comment on it, and then I would have not trusted the news. And it’s happened once or twice.

But otherwise, it’s usually trustworthy news that I read on LinkedIn, or especially- even on Google. And it’s always similar social… Maybe if it’s the BBC, then I’ll read news that is recommended by then, or certain websites that are similar to the BBC in the UK that I would read news from.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. So, you know, just to follow up on that a bit more, how do you work out if something is trustworthy?

Meera: I guess for me it depends on how authentic the news seems to be. Like, if it’s not something that’s too farfetched, or if this is not coming up with something that, you know, you never hard of before. Because when it comes to news, it’s news of something that I’ve probably read about before, that’s a follow-up to the previous news, and then it’s just continues like that, kind of, like, a cycle. It’s connected to the following news, or to something that I’ve read before, maybe in something- you know, even if it’s something new, I’ll read something- maybe the following day I’ll read something about that news, the next week I’ll read something more.

So, I’ll have additional information about what has happened about those things before. So, its easy to connect that information with more or new information, and be, like, “Okay. So, this is still trustworthy and still believable. They’re not coming up with some hokey.”

Interviewer: Okay. So, when you are, kind of, realising- I guess, okay, so, you’re talking about being familiar with the source, or the topic.

Meera: The news, yes. Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, so, what’s more important, do you think? Is it the topic? Or is it the source?

Meera: I think both. It just depends on, like, you know, what the topic is, or what it is about, and also if that information is coming from a good source, then it’s easier to believe it.

Interviewer: Yes. So, you’re, kind of, making these judgement balances, calls, kind of, in your head.

Meera: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Almost, you know, I guess this is the thing. I guess we, kind of, do these things without really thinking about them. And this is the point of, kind of, what I’m trying to get out here is, I wonder if, yes, we can, kind of, try and explain that.

So, you know, I think following familiar topics is interesting, that you mentioned.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Or familiar subjects, or stories that, kind of, follow on. But I guess at some point, there must be, kind of, new breaking news that happen.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: And so, say there’s a breaking news story today about, I don’t know, some kind of health scare.

Meera: Okay.

Interviewer: Yes, you know, what factors would determine whether you trusted that news? If you, say, encountered that somewhere on the internet, what factors would you need to be able to determine whether you trusted that, without going off and doing further research?

Meera: So, then that depends on what news source is delivering that information. And if I’ve read news stories in that place before. Maybe if it was something really serious, I would even look at the comments, if anyone’s commented on it being a real thing. If the same news source has any further articles about it, they have, like, articles that are written by different people about similar things, go and read that as well. And then I would go and do a bit more research, if I had to.

Interviewer: So, you would look at the comments, yes. And you would look at other articles from the same source.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, and then finally, you might then do some more external research by searching for that topic, or some key words, or something.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you ever stopped following a certain news source, or website, because you stopped trusting it at some point?

Meera: No, I don’t think that’s happened.

Interviewer: Okay. So, I want to talk about: how’s your trust in news and information been affected by I guess recent events? Such as, you know, the rise of fake news and disinformation campaigns during COVID, for example. But also, technological things, like deepfakes and AI-generated content. How has that affected the way you trust news and online information?

Meera: I think it depends on, like, again, one news- if it’s AI-generated, then obviously you’d find out if it’s AI-generated, and then you’d know that it’s not trustworthy. So, it’s about, you know, even when these news articles are, like, recommended to you, or you read about them, so, most of the time, they also provide you with other sources, like, references, or what person is telling you this, if they have someone who’s actually said information, then it’s easier to actually, you know, follow up and see if it’s authentic information, or just been made up by someone, or things like that.

Because sometimes it’s easy to refer between news that’s made up and that’s actually authentic. But there’s news that is made up sometimes lacks any sources, lacks any citations, or any differences. So, what is the follow-up? If there’s no other information given to what I can refer to, then obviously it’s fake information, because there’s no, you know, no way to follow up on that news if it’s only been created by that one news source, and it is fake.

Interviewer: Okay. We’ll come back to that in a sec. But just to come back to the question, to be a bit more general, do you think your awareness of AI-generated and deepfake and stuff has affected the way that you trust online information, or have you just maintained a similar level of trust since before the pandemic and before AI and deepfakes? Do you think it affects the way in general people should trust online information?

Meera: Yes, I think especially now, with the amount of AI infiltration that is with social media and every other platform, I think it’s really important that people are a lot more vigilant with how they- what news articles do they refer to, and what news articles are they sharing with their friends and family, and forwarding to other people as well. I think that’s very important.

And unless you verify the source of some information, you know, with some other article as well, or you see that there’s some references that you can refer to, then it’s unnecessary, it might just be fake, and you’re just spreading that disinformation. That’s where the whole thing started about the misinformation thing as well, that people were just sharing, you know, fake information with each other on WhatsApp and whatever, without actually verifying whether it was right or wrong. And that’s just how disinformation spreads.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. And you mentioned, you know, people need to be more vigilant.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: And I guess this might be difficult to answer, but I’ll ask anyway. You know, what does that look like? Like, how do people become more vigilant? I mean, you mentioned checking sources. Is there anything else people do to become more vigilant in these times?

Meera: Maybe not following- maybe if you used to follow sources that provide you with disinformation, unfollow those sources, and then start following a trustworthy one. And even when people- like, you know people share information with you, like, on WhatsApp; I have some friends who share information, news stories with me on WhatsApp, don’t just listen to what they’ve said, and then share it further. Do your own verification, your own research on it, and then you can- you know, then obviously, feel free to share it with other people, and, like- but it’s important that you verify the information that is being shared by you. That is being shared to you by other people.

Interviewer: Okay. And do you think the development of these new technologies – deepfakes, AI, etc – will affect people’s ability to do this verification in the future?

Meera: Possibly. But I wouldn’t be able to tell you for sure, because I haven’t actually done that much research on it so far. I’ve never really had recommendations of, you know, like, articles from AI and things like that. So, it’s just something that someone- you’d have to wait and see how much infiltration into actual news, does, you know, the existence of AI cause.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. So, do you think you are someone who is able to tell the difference between authentic images, audio and videos, and fake ones?

Meera: Yes, I think sometimes, when the need comes, I think it’s easy to be able to differentiate between it. And then again, it’s also- because I would- because you know it’s fake really compli- it’s really, like, when it comes to looking at news articles, sometimes you can just tell when, you know, certain audio-visuals that are there are fake.

Because you see some of these on TikTok as well, where people are just creating AI-generated characters of famous people, and then they’re making them say news stories. And then you can tell that that’s not real. Because there’s always a way that it sounds different. And if you’re just vigilant about that, I think that’s all that is.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. And I guess, like, just to labour on this point, as, you know, you’re saying there are, kind of, tells, now, and you feel fairly confident you could tell something was fake, visual or audio.

Meera: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: But do you think as these get better, as these things advance, do you have any concerns about how people are able to verify the difference between fake and truth in the future?

Meera: Yes, I think so.

Interviewer: And, I mean, do you think- so, what do you think the, kind of, impact of that will be, then?

Meera: Sorry, your voice is breaking, what was the last question?

Interviewer: So, yes, you said that you do have concerns about people’s ability to verify whether something’s new or fake because of the advancement of technology.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: What I asked was, what do you think the impacts of that uncertainty might be in the future?

Meera: Erm, I think it would just lead to, you know, like, more disinformation, more confusion among people about what is authentic and what is not.

Interviewer: Yes, I mean, what’s the risks of this confusion? What are the impacts of this increased confusion?

Meera: Because it just leads to more, like, false information spreading, and people just not knowing what sources to trust, and what information- I mean, especially for things like healthcare-related stuff, if people start spreading disinformation, then it’s really hard for people to trust on what news is clear and what news is not. And then they have to refer to only healthcare sources, which is, like, NHS themselves, to have to get actual authentic information.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. You think, you know, people will just rely more on sources like the NHS?

Meera: Yes. Like, official government sources only.

Interviewer: Okay, so there might just be a lack of trust in any media, and more just on, kind of, official sources.

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, I just want to ask you, how comfortable are you with the use of algorithms to personalise news consumption for you? So, you mentioned LinkedIn, and you mentioned Google notifications, for example. So, yes, how comfortable are you with that personalisation?

Meera: I think I don’t have anything against it. I think in a way, it’s really good and healthy, because I get the kind of news that I’m interested in, and that’s the news that I get to read, and I don’t- if there’s some kind of news that I don’t like to consume, which is maybe about entertainment, or [ \_\_\_ 0:37:38] think about it at all. And then I don’t get those recommended, which is something I prefer a lot more.

Interviewer: So, you think there’s a kind of convenience…

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Doing some work for you. You don’t have to search all over. You’re getting…

Meera: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you ever been concerned, though, about the use of your personal data by, like, news websites or social media apps?

Meera: Hmm. Not particularly. These are things I don’t really think about, because if I do, then I’ll start stressing about it, and then- but then it’s something that you can’t really do anything about, can you? Unless I just completely stop reading the news, and just avoid it, there’s nothing else that I can actually do about it.

Interviewer: Yes.

Meera: So, I would rather just avoid really thinking about it.

Interviewer: I wonder, then, just in a more general sense, you know, how often do you take the time to adjust the cookie settings on websites?

Meera: Sometimes. I mean, I get those recommended almost every time I open a new website. Sometimes if I have, like, the three seconds that it takes, then I will open, you know, it will give me the option to reject the settings or customise the settings, and then I’ll go about quickly clicking ‘reject, reject, reject’ on each of them, and then I’ll let it be. But them sometimes if I’m in a rush, for example, if I’m looking for a recipe, or some kind of news, or I urgently need to know something, then I’ll just accept it, like, I don’t really need to think about it.

Interviewer: Okay. And is that the same as, like you said, a moment earlier, you think it’s something that’s difficult to do anything about? So, instead of getting stressed, it’s best just to not think about it?

Meera: Yes. Yes, exactly, yes. It’s the same. Like, it’s, kind of, like, the same thing for me for everything.

Interviewer: Okay. So, I was going to ask, you know, what steps you take. So, apart from just adjusting cookie settings when you have time, are there any other steps that you take to protect your, kind of, privacy and personal data online?

Meera: So, on some of the apps, that I’m able to do a block, like, you know, then it will access my location, my contacts, and things like that. But again, it’s if I know how to do it, and if I’m familiar with what the website is, then I’m able to do it. Otherwise, again, I don’t really, like, pay attention to it, and I just let it be as it is.

Interviewer: Yes. Apart from these fears about privacy, what do you think are the main impacts of these personalised newsfeeds on the type of information people become exposed to?

So, you mentioned already that it’s convenient sometimes. So, you know, but what do you think are the other impacts of this way people access and get exposed to information?

Meera: Erm, I’m not sure. I think maybe it depends on, like, individually how things work for someone, I think, and how they themselves, you know, how much they care about verifying what the trusted sources are, and how they consume news.

Interviewer: Yes. I mean, let’s just think about you, then. So, you said there are certain topics that you read articles about, and then you get recommended those, similar topics, and you find that’s a convenient thing to do. But do you think maybe there are any other less positive side effects of this way of consuming news, or being exposed to information? Do you have any concerns about that at all?

Meera: I think the only concern that I would have about it is how people, like- how disinformation increases. So, one person finds a news article randomly on Facebook, and then they share it with 20 other people, and those 20 people share it with more 20 people, it’s just spreading more of that false information. And then people start believing that as true. And if it’s also something that’s about the government, or about healthcare or something, then it’s really important. And then people start mistrusting the government, or having different, or false opinions about it, based on these certain news sources, that just makes it, like, you know, harder for things to be working well.

Interviewer: Okay. So, we spoke about this a little earlier, but I just wanted to focus on it more now. How important is it to you that news sources are transparent about their sources, and their methods of reporting?

Meera: Yes, I think it’s definitely important. I think it is definitely important for me. If I don’t find other references, or other sources in a particular article, I wouldn’t really trust that article. I would have to go and verify it with other articles on Google.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. And then I guess I want to think about the BBC, and the idea of state broadcasters. Do you think that state broadcasters like the BBC should be subject to different standards or regulations than privately owned news outlets?

Meera: Erm, I’m not sure. I haven’t really thought about it, so…

Interviewer: Okay. So, what do you think in general the producers of online news can do to become more credible and more trustworthy in the eyes of people?

Meera: Erm, the main thing would be, like, you know, telling people, “What are the sources of news that you are- or sources of news of other people who have actually provided you with this information?” Or, “What kind of, you know, source are you referring to when you provide us with these themes.” I think that’s most important. To make sure that some of these news stories are more credible for people to actually trust them, and actually, you know, follow them.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm, okay. Thank you. I just wanted to turn attention to the big sheet of your book [assent 0:45:33]. So, I mean, what were your feelings on looking at these? So, it says, you know, it’s ascertained that you are curious.

Meera: Yes. I’ve read it. I think I find it really interesting how it- like, I mean, I would say that, okay, the information it’s provided me could be really interesting and accurate about myself. But then it also makes me curious as to how they actually infer these things from only the news articles that I’ve provided them with, and the information that I was giving about them.

But otherwise, it’s interesting. I haven’t really received that kind of conclusion from certain, like, these services before, so it’s just interesting to know that something like that can actually happen.

Interviewer: Hmmhmm. Yes, I mean, do you have any- I guess if you think, you know, based on just two weeks of you sharing some news articles, we were able to, kind of, make these inferences and assumptions. Do you think there are any other kind of concerns or impacts around that kind of thing? How do you think this- yes, does that raise any questions or anything for you?

Meera: No, I think, I’m sure there was a process that was followed, and there’s probably algorithms they will use from the news source, about the news sources that are provided. So, you know, I guess reading it kind of made it make sense. It was just easier for me to be, like, “Okay, so, it might be accurate, it might be accurate, but it’s not like there’s a way for me to look through it otherwise.”

Interviewer: Okay. So, yes, were there any other aspects of any of the study that you want to, kind of, reflect on? Or any comments you want to make?

Meera: No, I think that was all. It was just an interesting thing to be a part of. And even the discussion was quite, like, you know, something different. So, yes. There’s nothing that I can think of, though.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, I’ll stop recording now, but I’ll just talk for a couple of more moments afterward.

END AUDIO

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