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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Okay, so, yes, like I’ve just said, that’s your data diary book. So, the first thing I wanted you to look at in there is on page… I think on page four. Yes, on page four, it has the most frequent times of day you send us news.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, what I wanted you to do, if you can, is have a look at that. Do you think that accurately reflects actually when you do read news online, first of all? Then second of all, could you just talk us through those time periods and what you looking at news looks like at those different times, etc?

Agatha: Yes. So, the biggest chunk is evening, which looks like nearly half. Then the next one being afternoon. I’d say, yes, and then there’s noon, morning, early morning. So, it’s like day reversed [is one 0:01:22]. (Laughter) All of my frequency picture shows… I think, yes, that’ll probably tie in with how much I actually look at my phone. So, I’m just more active in the morning. Not actually- I just get up and cycle to work, or if I’m not going to work, I get up and do something. My phone’s not really a big part of my life. (Laughter) So, I’m not looking at news, or social media, or anything on my phone.

Then I’d say I’ve got a bigger chunk in the morning or afternoon rather than noon, and I don’t know if that’s just- I find myself looking on little breaks from work, or when I go and make a cup of tea. So, I don’t know if I’ve got more of a chunk in the mornings and afternoons because of those things. Like, having a break and then if I’m having more of a lunch break, I tend to go for a walk outside or do something active again that’s not on my phone.

But then, yes, evening I tend to have more time on my phone and looking at social media and stuff. So, I guess that’s where my… Yes, when I was reading the news more.

Interviewer: So, as you talk through that then, is that mostly or all your mobile where you’re accessing?

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay, so mobile phone and I guess it says here 97% social media. So, is that a fair reflection of the way you’ve just talked through the day there, when you’re just having these moments of scrolling?

Agatha: Yes, it’ll be on social media. Then I think the only other links that I tend to- I used to have apps on my phone, but I don’t- I think they’re still there, but I don’t actually click on them anymore. So, the only other way that I’d find myself looking at news is if it’s through a link that somebody sent me. Or if I see something on social media and then follow it out to the actual site. But I would’ve still seen it on social media first, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely. So, you referred briefly there to a change of habit over time, or a change of your consumption pattern over time.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Maybe from using news apps directly to just going through to it. So, could you just talk a bit about that and how you think your patterns have changed to get to where they are now?

Agatha: I think when I was engaging more with news apps specifically, I found it quite depressing. The content I was seeing, it was just stuff that made me worry, made me despair at the world. It obviously made me more in tune with current events, but a lot of it was negative stuff. So, I distanced myself from that purposefully.

Then I think my other news outlets tend to come from the radio and listening to stuff. Obviously, that’s not through social media, so that’s where the current event stuff comes in. But I’m not searching it online anymore, because of the effect I found it had on me and my emotions. (Laughter)

Interviewer: So, do you think although you’re not actively searching for news online, do you think you’re still getting access to the same, less or more amount of news from when you used to go to news apps daily?

Agatha: Less. A lot less.

Interviewer: A lot less news.

Agatha: Yes, and then I think the news things that I see and that I was submitting during the study, I don’t know if I would actually class a lot of that as news, if you know what I mean. (Laughter) Like, there was one thing that was about a building in India, in Jaipur, and I was like, “Oh, that’s interesting,” and then I was like, “This building has been there for ages. Why would it suddenly be coming out as an article?” Because it was just talking about an interesting architectural building that has been there for a while.

Interviewer: Okay. I think that we were asking for news or information.

Agatha: Yes, okay.

Interviewer: So, I think-

Agatha: Yes, it made me think about, “What is news?” (Laughter) Because I was like- But, yes, that’s just an [existence 0:05:52] of me reading about something. So, yes, that’s good. (Laughter)

Interviewer: So, you say you’ve kind of thought about what is news and what isn’t.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: In that, you’ve kind of thought you’re not actually accessing much news, but you’re accessing bits of information about buildings in Jaipur, or whatever else.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: But you do say you’ve- Well, you clearly have clicked through social media several times to BBC. A few times to the Guardian. So, you are going to these news sites still.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, how would you characterise the difference? So, say you maybe would’ve read more than 25 BBC news articles over a two-week period, when you were going to it.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, what kind of things are you likely to click through and are you doing some kind of process where you think, “That’s interesting,” or not interesting, or, “That will be depressing,”? How does that work? How did you end up reading 25 BBC and 9 Guardian through social media?

Agatha: I think some of it will be how much I actually view from the social media site. So, I’d just infer from that, that I’ve seen more BBC. So, then it has caught my attention. I don’t think the BBC catches my attention more than the Guardian if I had them both next to each other. But then [maybe I do 0:07:26]. (Laughter) So, I just think I probably saw more BBC things to actually think- But then it’s like, yes, if it captures my attention or if it…

I found- There was something like… There were some articles that I wouldn’t normally click through, which was about somebody passing away. But I felt like I’ve seen a trend of more people from a certain area. So, then I was like, “Oh, that’s really weird,” and then it made me click through. So, yes, it was more intrigue rather than the actual subject that I was wanting to read more about.

But, yes, I suppose interesting. Things that I’m politically interested in and probably less- Yes, if there was anything that was particularly violent or… Yes, I would not even read and watch things like that. I would just go past it and get it away from me. (Laughter)

Interviewer: So, do you typically read just the headline or just the social media few words, or do you tend to read articles, or a bit of both? What determines which of those you would do?

Agatha: I think a bit of both. I think if it’s something that I think is particularly interesting, I would click and want to read more. Or some things- If I question what’s in the headline, or in the caption. Because I think there are some things that come up and I’m like, “I don’t think that’s the full picture. I think they’re doing a big headline to make it sound really bad or really good, but actually the reality probably isn’t…” So, that would make me click through and read it a bit more.

Interviewer: So, we’ll come back to that clickbait thing in a second. But I just wanted to- On page seven, the blue circles show these kinds of- During those [two 0:09:53] periods some of the topics and issues you were interested in. Do you think that’s fair or is anything on there surprising you?

Agatha: The K-pop one is the surprise. But that is what’s I was referring to where I’ve noticed just in the news a lot of K-pop stars dying under unclear circumstances. It’s a lot of people who are young. So, then I’ve started- Yes, I clicked on it and then I was like, “Because I’ve clicked on it, I’m getting more things shown at me.” (Laughter) So, I’m not a K-pop fan and I don’t really know anything in particular about the culture or anything. But it was that thinking-

I’m sure a few years ago, over the last few years even, I’ve heard of people dying from different bands and this, that and the other. That was a random thing that caught my interest when I was doing the study. (Laughter) Yes, but I think the other ones- Yes, natural disasters, conservation, relationships and science, I think they’re all what my interests are in. Movies, I think that’s probably just… Yes, that’s a lot of [news 0:11:19]. (Laughter) I don’t know if I interact with that.

Then sport- I’m surprised that sport’s on there, because I don’t feel- But then I do run, do triathlons and I like cycling, so that must get shown to me. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, these are just inferences that we’ve made.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: What do you think it is about some of these topics then that you think- Why do you tend to gravitate towards these topics in a general sense? You don’t have to give personal details or anything. But why do you think you gravitate towards some topic and issues and not others?

Agatha: I think there’s my natural interest and what my hobbies are and stuff. I studied science, so science and the natural world is something that I enjoy and I’m interested in. Yes, natural disasters… (Laughter) I don’t know why that is. Relationships and… Yes, I think it’s just all stuff that I’m interested in that’s relevant to me.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think that through the way you consume news, i.e. through social media, you’re more easily going towards these topics of things that are interesting to you personally, rather than when you were reading loads of terrible things that were making you feel bad?

Agatha: Yes. If I think about my Instagram, I have curated that in that I don’t follow many people and friends. I follow quite a lot of things like National Geographic, photographers and stuff. So, I tend- It’s things about space and, yes, photographs from space. (Laughter) So, that’s the kind of stuff that I like to scroll through, because I feel like it’s not- It’s all stuff that I’m interested in, and it’s not negative and it’s not about people’s lives. It’s more about the natural world and stuff.

Interviewer: But still would you consider some of that news? Would you-

Agatha: Well, I don’t know. (Laughter) If it’s just a picture of some wild animals, then I don’t think it’s news. But if it’s things about conservation efforts in a certain area, or recent research information, or the results of something that the implemented 20 years ago, that’s all stuff that-

Interviewer: That is included in that Instagram thing you were talking about. You do get this kind of information as well. It’s not just photographs, for example, that you’re following.

Agatha: Yes, I think I would- Yes, I think if it has got information- There are some things that I follow that will show graphs of improvements, declines or this kind of stuff. Yes, I think that’s what I’d consider as news. But if it’s- Yes, and then there are some photographers that have really interesting statistics and stuff in what they’re showing, and then there are some that just say, “I was watching a sunset,” and I don’t think that’s news. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, the sun sets every day, so… How often do you encounter online news and information that you suspect is either fake or misleading?

Agatha: I think often, particularly more political news. That was one thing that I find when I’m on apps. It was very much like I could… Yes, it’s the headline and then the app might be- Or, yes, the company might be a certain way and you can see that there’s an influence across what you’re seeing.

Interviewer: So, not necessarily fake, but misleading.

Agatha: Yes. Then I think there’s… Yes, I wouldn’t label anything as fake very quickly unless it… I don’t know. Unless it’s really badly photoshopped or AI [literally 0:16:11]. (Laughter) Or it’s just from chickennews.com or something ridiculous. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay, so you just started talking about that, but what would prompt you to check the accuracy of something you encounter online, and/or what methods do you use to verify the accuracy of things that you’re suspicious of?

Agatha: I think something that would prompt me is like if something’s very positive or very negative. I’d say it’s easier for me to think of an example in a scientific way. If something came out like, ‘There’s a drug that will cure Alzheimer’s…’ That was something that- That wasn’t quite the headline recently, but it was, ‘We’ve found something that will be a huge change.’ Because I understand more about the process behind how you test for drugs and all that kind of stuff, it makes me want to investigate the journal that has been published in, who has been involved in the study and who the study has been funded by.

That would make me question is, but there are some things that- Like celebrity news, or if somebody said, “This person is getting divorced,” I wouldn’t question it, because I don’t care. (Laughter) So, that’s part of it as well. Something that I care about, or something that I’ve got knowledge about already would make me question something.

Interviewer: You touched on there in terms of you wouldn’t care about celebrities or whatever, but what would motivate you to check the accuracy or just think something is misleading but not check?

Agatha: I feel like my motivation would be how much I care about it or not.

Interviewer: Are you about to characterise that in terms of- So, you caring about something, does it mean it’s related to your work? Or are you able to characterise, “That matters to me…”?

[Break in conversation 0:18:33 - 0:18:49]

Agatha: I don’t know if it is always something that matters to me and my life. Because that example with the Alzheimer’s, I don’t know if that matters to me. I don’t know how that would really matter to me. Like these K-pop stars, that doesn’t matter to me at all, but I was very intrigued as to that. Although, I didn’t do much to try to verify it or anything. (Laughter) I just read more about it from those news sites.

[Break in conversation 0:19:21 - 0:19:35]

Interviewer: We can move on if you like.

Agatha: I’m not sure.

Interviewer: That’s fine. Where would you go first to double-check something you weren’t sure was true? What sources would you turn to, to verify or double-check information?

Agatha: I think my first thing is looking at the source that I’m reading, the date and… Not the author specifically, but if there are quotes and if there are names in it, if there’s something that… Yes, if I thought, “They’re a trustworthy person because they’re an expert in their field,” or, “That’s somebody on the street that just gave an opinion.” Yes, I think that’s something that I notice and I would think, “Is that an opinion or is it backed-up with some kind of evidence or something?”

Then, yes, if it was something medical, then I wouldn’t necessarily go to the journal. But I’d be looking for names of a journal or a publisher or something in the articles. Then I don’t know if I would think about other news sites. Because if you’re only ever looking at more left-leaning news sites, you might be getting a skew, so…

Interviewer: Let’s think of as an example… So, if you read something on Facebook, or Twitter, or Instagram, and maybe it was a political story- So, some politician has done something and you cared enough about it to not just ignore it, what might be your process of cross-referencing, or fact-checking, or verifying that information?

[Break in conversation 0:21:54 - 0:22:08]

Agatha: I think it’s the same. Looking at the source of what’s published what I’m reading.

[Break in conversation 0:22:14 - 0:22:30]

Then, yes, if other sources, if other sites said the same thing. I don’t know where else I’d go for something political. Apart from talking to people, but I don’t think talking to my friends and stuff would verify anything. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, so just a couple of things. So, you said you’d go to different sites to see if they were also covering it, for example.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, what would be your go-to sites for that?

Agatha: I’d probably just Google it, then scroll down (Laughter) and have a look at the different hits that are coming up and what all those headlines and snapshots are. Then I might pick- There are things like the Independent, which I don’t necessarily trust that they are completely independent, but I’m more likely to click into that instead of, like, the Daily Mail. Yes, and then there are things like local papers. I wouldn’t trust local papers as much. (Laughter)

Interviewer: So, you might Google someone’s name or a keyword, then see if on the first page of a Google search, if some trusted source is also reporting on it.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: I just wanted to check something. When you were talking about your process, you said you would check the source of the story first.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: What are you referring to when you say, “The source,”?

Agatha: I think sometimes I mean what site it’s actually published on. So, I think some things- When it’s on social media, it’s suggested for you and it comes from chickennews.com or something ridiculous. So, I just wouldn’t trust that. Then what I also mean is like source- So, if in an article it’s saying a friend of a family member reports this and it’s some sort of gossipy thing or whatever, then I’m not going to trust that. But if it’s an interview with the person that it’s about, or a close family member of the person, then I’m more likely to trust the content of what’s in the article.

Interviewer: Okay. So, it’s the source as in which URL. Is it something.com that you trust?

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Then also, their transparency about the sources of the article. So, the content of the article as well.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. So, have you ever made a decision or done something based on something you’ve read online? Like an online news story, or something online. Can you think of any occasions when that has happened?

Agatha: I’ve had conversations about what I’ve read online.

Interviewer: Okay.

Agatha: I’m trying to think. There are things like at the start of winter, when the fuel prices were getting hiked up, there was lots of stuff getting shared. Like, ‘Make sure you put in your metre readings by this date.’ I did that. (Laughter) Yes, so that’s an action that I’ve actually taken. I think there are things like the way I vote politically is not directly all based on what I read off the news, but it will be heavily influenced.

Interviewer: When you think about sharing, do you…? Maybe you didn’t report on it much in these two weeks, but do you feel- How often do you tend to share things you’ve read online?

Agatha: I wouldn’t share directly from my phone. I wouldn’t share links. I tend to just talk to people about what I might’ve read. But, yes, I think I rarely would share a link to something.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you ever really changed your mind about a certain issue or maybe a person based on something you’ve read online?

Agatha: Yes. (Laughter) Would you like an example?

Interviewer: Yes, I would.

Agatha: Rolf Harris. (Laughter) Yes, I think there are those revealing… Yes, that would change my mind. I think those things, it’s obvious why you would change your mind and that’s probably a very common one. I’m trying to think if there are any others. I think there are some things- This isn’t necessarily a person, but it’s an issue. In conservation, things that I see online make me- I haven’t got- I don’t think I’m very strongly- It’s not like I’ve got a very strong view in one way, but different things that I see online make me change my mind a little bit about the worth of some conservation efforts.

All the money that goes into it. Yes, it makes me question certain things and, yes, it makes me see different views. Because I haven’t got a very strong opinion one way, it’s not like I’m really changing my mind. But it’s making me more ambiguous on how I feel about certain things.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that you don’t share stuff, but you do discuss stuff you’ve read. So, could you talk a bit about that? Do you discuss things with family, or friends? Do you discuss things regularly? How do these kinds of conversations tend to play out?

Agatha: I think I probably discuss things more regularly with my boyfriend, just because we’re talking more regularly. We’ve got a lot of the same interests. Then with my family and friends, I think there are some friends that I see- My family and friends that see every week, really regularly, it would just be specific stuff that caught my eye that they would be interested in. Or if I’m like, “Oh, did you see that? Isn’t that weird?”

Then I’ve got some friends who live further away and then if there was anything that was specific that makes me think of then, or something that I know they’re interested in as well, I would share it. So, I’ve got a friend who lives in New Zealand and he’s really into space. So, often, if there’s anything new about space that I see, I will think to share it with him. Yes, to talk to him about it. So, I guess, yes, that’s mainly about what I’m interested in and then me thinking about other people and if they would be interested in what I’ve read.

Interviewer: So, you would talk about news where you would have a shared interest with someone.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Then you said though with your boyfriend that might be a more regular thing. So, how might that [play out 0:31:09]? Might you just regularly go, “Have you read the news today?” or, “Did you read…?” Or are there certain again shared interests, topics that you might discuss? Or is it quite ad hoc?

Agatha: I think it’s probably a bit ad hoc. Yes, there are certain things that I know he’d be interested in, or that I’ll be like, “Oh, this is really cool. You should read it,” or, “You should see it,” or, “Let’s talk about it.” Or something that if I get particularly excited or interested in something, I just want to talk about it. Even if he’s not that bothered, I’m just like, “I’m excited about it, so I want to talk about it.” Then some things, yes, really random. Not necessarily stuff that we’re interested in.

Like we’re not interested in the royals, but every now and again there’s something funny that comes up that we’ll talk about. (Laughter) So, yes, I think it’s probably a bit of both with that. But sometimes is it just conversational, or, “Have you seen this?” and it’s not necessarily based on a particular passion or interest. It’s just something that has been eye-catching.

Interviewer: Yes, so there’s- You’re regularly reading stuff every day and then sometimes that just forms part of- That starts a bit of chit-chat, or a conversation.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: “Oh, did you see that thing today?”

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes. Okay, so, we’ve talked a little bit about the frequent sources of news that you shared during the study and that you go to. Do you tend to rely, do you think, on some sources more than others? Has that changed at all over time?

Agatha: Yes, I think I do rely on the BBC and the Guardian a lot more. (Laughter) Yes, like I say, I used to look at apps and then that changed. So, now it’s like what is- It’s all through scrolling. So, it’s just what’s being shown to me, rather than me looking at a selection of a lot of different things and deciding what I can choose from, like how you would on an app or a website.

Interviewer: Do you think that’s a different process? Because you have mentioned that you can ignore things or choose on an app. But also, is that similar to what is happening just be scrolling past something and stopping at other things?

Agatha: I think it’s a similar process in what I’ll stop to look at. But I think if I’m using an app or a website, it tends to have the top five or the top ten daily news- It has just got more in the field of the screen and it’s less targeted at me. So, I think when it’s on social media, I’m like- It’s conservation, it’s science, it’s relationships. It’s the stuff that I’m obviously engaging in and reading more. So, I just think it’s fulfilling- It’s filling the bubble that I’m creating. (Laughter)

Whereas, if I was using an app or a website, it’s just set up differently, or in the way that I think of it. Where it has these top five, top ten, it’s more likely to have banners relating to what everyone wants to click on rather than what I want to look at.

Interviewer: So, not personalised.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. We’ll come onto personalised in a little bit. So, you, as we’ve said, get a high percentage of your news and information through social media. How do you feel about the role of social media in being this disseminator of news and online information?

Agatha: I think it’s like- There’s a level of- It’s easy to feel like you’re engaged if it’s on social media. For a lot of people, it’s access. It gives access where they might not- Like I’m not really engaging with news elsewhere on a phone or a screen. It’s only through social media. But I’m aware of the personalisation of it, so I don’t think I get a good world view of news. Yes, like I was saying, I wasn’t getting a lot of current affairs getting shown to me, because I’m not engaging with a lot of current affairs.

The political, I wasn’t getting. I was getting some political stuff, but more related to what I’m interested in and not just general political themes and stuff, yes. So, I’m like, yes, good access, but I think I’m not as trusting of what I see. I’m aware that’s not- Yes, it is personalised.

Interviewer: So, it does affect- The role of social media in disseminating news does affect the way you trust.

Agatha: Yes, I’m less trustful of it through social media, I think.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is? I’m just trying to work out if that’s an impossible question. Yes, what is it do you think about social media and the role of social media as this is where you get news from now, what is it about that that creates this less trustworthy feeling?

Agatha: I think it’s the- I don’t understand all the algorithms behind it, but it’s like what you read and engage with more, and spend more time looking at, they just give you more and more and more of that, and it dilutes the rest out. I think if its for- In terms of absorbing news and current affairs, often I think, “Oh, I should be more engaged in current affairs.” But then whenever I have tried to get engaged, I tend to get more depressed about the state of the world. (Laughter)

So, yes, there’s a level of, “Oh, this is news that I think is nice and acceptable,” but I know that it’s shielding me from a lot of stuff when I only have it through social media.

Interviewer: That’s interesting. So, how… The first part of this, I can probably guess the answer to, but how important is it to you that news that you consume comes from a trusted source, and how do you determine if it is a trustworthy source?

Agatha: I think it’s quite important that it’s trustworthy. (Laughter) Then how I determine, I think I use sites that I know, recognise and just trust more than others, and also are more likely to say things that I want them to say. (Laughter)

Interviewer: So, there’s a familiarity. Because it sounds like a silly question to say, “How important is it that the news comes from a trusted source?”

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: But I guess what I’m getting at is somebody on- I haven’t got a list of yours. But there were some social media accounts that might break news, or comment on some news, or something, and I guess, yes, how- At that level of source, how would you determine if something like that was a trustworthy source or not? What kinds of things might you look to?

Agatha: I think if it’s an individual, is it a real individual? Then are they from the field that they’re commenting on? Do they have any expertise? What’s their…? Where have they got the information from? If it was an organisation, it would be, do I recognise the organisation? So, National Geographic, I’m far more likely to trust that than, I don’t know, something that probably has title with those words in, but I’ve never heard of it before. So, yes, if it’s something that’s familiar, that’s already known to me, I’m going to trust it more.

Interviewer: Have you ever stopped following any news source or site or anything, because you stopped trusting it or you no longer trusted it?

Agatha: I think I probably have, but I… Yes, I think on Instagram there was… Yes, I think there have been some- I’m trying to think of a specific one, but there was a channel that did graphics of certain news and then after a while, I just didn’t… Well, some of it, I didn’t know if I was learning anything from the graphs, and then also, yes, I just didn’t know if I really trusted it and was interested in it.

Interviewer: Do you think there was something that led to that distrust, rather than just a disinterest?

[Break in conversation 0:42:08 - 0:42:19]

Agatha: I think probably the main distrust that I’ve had is that I’ve built a bubble that’s so strong in one direction and then I’ve been… It has made me distrust stuff that was very… Like, if I felt like it’s too political and left, and then that might be just influencing me more and more and more, so then that has made me step away from certain things. But I can’t think of a specific thing that I’ve unfollowed.

Interviewer: Or become maybe more sceptical or suspicious about some sites.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Because they reinforce your view too well.

Agatha: Because then I think I’m- I know that I’m just creating a bubble and that the real world isn’t just what my bubble looks like. So, it makes me more disappointed in the world, because I can get tricked into thinking that everybody thinks in the same way and that everybody cares about each other. (Laughter) Then you’ll look at the TV and it’s like, “Oh, no, we still live in England and we have this government.” (Laughter)

So, I think- It’s not like- I don’t know if it’s trust. Yes, the trust in the sources, or me thinking I should be more realistic. Like less trust in myself, in continuously consuming all this stuff that isn’t necessarily representative of the world as it is.

Interviewer: So, are you saying that you sometimes encounter stuff online…? Are you saying that sometimes makes you more aware of this sense of a bubble?

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: That would sometimes make you go, “Wait a minute.”

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. That’s interesting. So, you might pay less credence to certain accounts, or sites, or sources of information if they seem- I don’t know. I don’t want to put words into your mouth. So, never- You haven’t thought of an example of something that has said something where you go, “That’s so not true and that’s fake, so I’m going to stop following you.” It has been more, “That is…” I can’t- Yes, is that- I don’t know what I’m trying to say now. It’s just really interesting what you said. It has got me thinking.

Agatha: Yes, I think I’ve noticed… This is going back a long time, but with Brexit-

Interviewer: Yes, I was going to say, if you could give an example, that might be great.

Agatha: Brexit. I was a very strong Remainer and everything in my bubble was. So, I was absolutely convinced- I was like, “There is no way. There is no way this country is going to vote to exit.” Then we did, and I was so devasted. (Laughter) I still feel emotional about it now. That morning, watching the TV was so shattering. Then after that, I was like- I feel like there’s a responsibility for myself. I really just believed everything that was in my bubble and just was so adamant. “There’s no way that half the country can actually believe a different view.”

That’s actually quite damaging and scary. Of course everyone has different views. So, pretty much from that point, I’ve been… I can try and engage, but I’m more like, “Don’t blind yourself to what’s happening.” Yes, what the opposition says, and that there are lots of different oppositions about any issue.

So, yes, if there’s stuff that I see that I’m like, “That’s amazing. That will be so great if that exists…” Yes, I really want to celebrate that and then I have this other voice that’s like, “Loads of people won’t support that. Loads of people will not do that. That’s not representative of society or the world. That’s what you want, but it’s not what the majority wants.”

Interviewer: That makes sense. You’re not the only person that has used that example actually to talk about similar things.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Thinking about technology and stuff a bit more now then, and then we will talk about personalisation as well as a form of this. But just to ease us towards that, how has your trust in news and information- It’s kind of touching on the example you’ve just said, but I wonder if there are more examples or you can talk about it more generally. How has your trust in information sources been affected by recent events, such as fake news, disinformation campaigns, also deepfakes, AI, things like that? Yes, how has your trust in news and information online been affected by those kinds of events?

Agatha: I think all of it makes me distrust anything that I see on the internet. (Laughter) Specifically recently with the AI stuff. Because I work at the uni, we’ve heard about ChatGPT or whatever it is. Lots of the lecturers are talking about that and how it can just create an essay in minutes, well, seconds, that’s really good. It can translate things really well. So, all of that has just made me really distrust anything.

Then also imagery. So, recently, there was a wildlife photography competition that was won, and then the entry- The entered person rejected the prize, because it was created by AI and he did it to show that we can’t tell anymore. So, I’ve seen quite a lot of stuff like that and that has made me-

Because like I say, I’ve made Instagram… (Laughter) I follow a lot of photographers and stuff that’s to do with animals and the natural world, then now I’ll look at stuff and be like, “Well, that could be fake, and that could be fake, and that could be fake.” (Laughter) So, yes, it has made me very distrustful. (Laughter)

Interviewer: I’m having these conversations a few times a day with people. It’s…

Agatha: Yes. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay, do you think you’re able to tell the difference right now between a fake or an authentic photograph, or video, or piece of audio? Do you feel when you’re encountering this and stuff online, you would be able to spot a fake?

Agatha: I’d like to say, “Yes.” But I actually- Because of all the recent stuff, I think, no, I don’t know if I could.

Interviewer: I felt like the way I asked that, I was going to do some kind of reveal.

Agatha: Yes, like, “Oh.” (Laughter)

Interviewer: “I tricked you.” Yes, so, okay, you think you feel like you want to say you could tell, but you’re not really sure. So, from that, how do you think the development of these technologies will affect people in general’s ability to verify online information and news? Do you think that will have an effect and what kind of effect?

Agatha: Yes, I think… I don’t know how anyone’s going to tell what’s real and what’s not. I don’t know how aware people will be of that. So, it could easily- Stuff can just be believed, sensationalised and potentially get a lot of attention and belief from it. I don’t know. Or everyone will be like me and be like, “I don’t trust anything anymore. Nothing is safe.” (Laughter) Yes.

Interviewer: So, yes, making… You think both of those things really. So, a mixture of people being more vulnerable to misinformation.

Agatha: Misinformation, yes.

Interviewer: But also a loss of certainty and trust.

Agatha: Yes. The loss of trust will be interesting, because I think… I don’t know. This is more my view of that I don’t trust most politicians. Then I wonder if actually this starting to distrust news- If more people started to not trust the news and stuff, then maybe there’ll be a shift in not trusting our government in the same way. I don’t know.

Interviewer: Maybe it’ll go the other way.

Agatha: It could do.

Interviewer: People don’t trust the media, so the only source of truth is… Okay. Now that we’re talking about joyful things, (Laughter) how would you describe how comfortable you are with the use of algorithms to personalise your newsfeed? You’re obviously aware of it, because you’ve discussed it and you still accept it.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, yes, could you just talk about how comfortable you are with that?

Agatha: I think I’m comfortable with it in the sense of… I feel like I’ve got no control over that happening and if it is showing me the stuff that I want to read and the stuff that I like, that I’m going to learn from or that I’m engaging with, then it’s good in that sense. But as I said before, I am very aware that it’s strengthening stuff within my bubble and it does shield me from a lot of stuff. Yes, so I’m probably more comfortable than uncomfortable, but I still have that awareness.

Interviewer: Then I wonder if you could talk about that in the context of what you’ve done on Instagram. Because the way you talked about that was you’ve created a feed that you’ll enjoy, that won’t cause any stress. It’s a place to go, “Ah.” Do you feel that you’ve took advantage of the algorithmic personalisation there?

Agatha: I hadn’t thought of it in that way, but, yes, I suppose I have. Yes, and then I think if I- Then if I follow something new and then I start getting a lot of other suggestions, or other things coming into that space that I don’t want, I’ll notice that and then I will take them out. I’ll unfollow those. There are things like- Sometimes, if you close something, it says, ‘See less of this,’ and I’ll be like, ‘Yes.’ That’s the only time that I’ll really engage. It would be like, ‘Yes, get that off my feed.’ So, yes, I do take advantage of it.

Interviewer: You do participate in trying to make the algorithm work better for you.

Agatha: Yes. Like is say, if there’s anything that’s violent- Yes, if there’s violence that comes up and it’s showing me videos and reels, and it’s just in my face, I’ll do what I can to not have that- I don’t want that to be caught as an engagement and to be increased. But, yes, I would try to delete that and say, “I don’t want to see that.”

Interviewer: Do you think- Have you ever been concerned about the use of your personal data by news website and apps?

Agatha: No. (Laughter) I am now.

Interviewer: Okay, so, are you the sort of person that will change the cookie settings on websites when prompted?

Agatha: No.

Interviewer: You just accept.

Agatha: Yes. Yes, “Just go away.”

Interviewer: “Get away. I’ve got something to do. You’ve popped up. Go away. Whatever it means.”

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: Great. So, yes, you’re aware that your personalised newsfeed is based on things they know about you, but that’s not a concern. Okay. You have talked about this a bit, but I’ll just take it out as a separate question. What do you think are the main impacts of personalised newsfeeds on the type of information that people are exposed to?

Agatha: I think this is the- Like that you’re just shielded from a lot of other things. Because it’s showing you more of what you already like, or what you already engage with. Potentially, yes, showing you more of that. So, you tend to go off on a certain tangent and a certain pathway, and you don’t get any of the other stuff being shown at you.

Interviewer: You’ve already talked about how that makes people vulnerable in a way.

Agatha: Yes. I think vulnerable and not necessarily well-informed with what they do engage with and what you feel like you’re learning from, because you’re not getting different views.

Interviewer: So, thinking about online news reporting, how do you feel about the level of objectivity in online news reporting, both by the big trusted ones and everything else? Do you think online news reporting has affected objectivity?

[Break in conversation 0:58:52 - 0:59:04]

Agatha: I don’t really know.

Interviewer: That’s fine.

Agatha: Do you mean with comments, with people challenging what’s being said?

Interviewer: I think, yes, you can think- Yes, that kind of thing. Perhaps also the way news is presented online maybe differently to the way it’s presented on radio, or TV, or in newspapers? So, yes, just anything about- I guess a better question would just be, what do you think the differences are between the way news is presented to us online and not online? Is there a difference, do you think?

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: How would you characterise that difference?

Agatha: I think when it’s online and especially social media and stuff, it’s all to capture your attention. So, it’s going to be more sensationalist, more extreme. Obviously, a headline is a headline and that has been in newspapers forever, but I think, yes, if you’ve got a newspaper or you’ve got a full article or a full video, you’ve got the option to engage with it all or not. Whereas, when it’s online, it’s often just a snippet and you have to take an action to go and see the full article or the full video, or something and everything.

So, it’s like, ‘Click the link in the bio to go…’ So, you can easily feel like you’re consuming a lot of news, but you’re not actually taking in the story itself. So, it’s all a lot shorter, a lot snappier and quick consumption.

Interviewer: What do you think the result of that is for people that do engage in news in that way?

Respondent: I suppose not getting the full story. Not getting the full description of what it is. If you just take the headline, then it is going to be more, I don’t know, extreme. Yes, like the Alzheimer’s drug being, ‘Cure for Alzheimer’s’ and then that’s not what it is. But if you don’t click through and read anything else about it, then you could just believe what the headline says.

Interviewer: I’ll just finish by talking about broadcasters in a more general way, but in the context of what we’ve talked about. So, do you think that state broadcasters, i.e. the BBC, should be subject to different regulations and different standards to other news sources, whether they be online or advertisement paid or whatever? Do you think the state broadcasters should have different regulations and standards?

[Break in conversation 1:02:23 - 1:02:35]

Agatha: I don’t know. I think it would be nice if everything was trustworthy and impartial. But that’s not how everything works.

Interviewer: Yes, that’s fine. You don’t think the BBC should be different, you think everyone should be under the same-

Agatha: Yes, I think everyone should be under the same rules, to be honest. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, that’s fine. That’s what I want. It’s just- Some of these can just be quick answers. I’m asking your opinion. If you think it’s impossible, you can still say what you want. Do you think- So, in this age of heightened political polarisation that we’ve discussed and also this for some people distrust in the media in general, what do you think media producers can do to maintain credibility and trustworthiness?

Agatha: To make sure their sources of information are correct and trustworthy. Then in whatever format they’re putting out, it’s not sensationalised, or influenced to be a certain way, or has an aim. It should be impartial and factual.

Interviewer: Do you think they’re able to do- Do you think that’s a thing they’re able to do? Or do you think there’s something- Do you think it’s actually a credible thing for them to do? Because some people might think, “That’s an old-fashioned way of thinking about journalism.” Yes, okay, I’ll ask, do… You mentioned the sources. You said, “Make sure the sources are trustworthy.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, do you think it’s important that media producers are transparent about their sources, and also their methods or reporting, in order to create that scenario?

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: What…? I don’t know. I guess, yes, that’s an important thing, but what…? Do you think that’s integral to the way that you would trust them or not, or do you think there are other factors?

Agatha: I think in an ideal world it would be nice if the way that news is produced is all done like that. But I think the reality is that it isn’t and I still consume it and believe stuff that I read. So, I think, yes, in an ideal world it is integral, but the reality is that it’s not integral, because I still believe stuff. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, but it does affect your level of trust in…

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: You’re still making that judgement.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, it still matters to you in a sense.

Agatha: Yes, I’m still not fully trusting of stuff that I see unless I see the journal or it’s from something I trust already.

Interviewer: Great. Well, I’m finished with my questions. I guess one thing I just wanted to know, on page six of your thing, we’ve got the trust and familiarity. What was striking about your diagram- Because they all tended to look like this and yours is a T shape. So, first of all, that showed that you… Well, what does that show, do you think? What can we make of that graph?

Agatha: That everything I’m consuming is pretty familiar. The sources I think are all quite familiar. (Laughter)

Interviewer: But I think like you just said, you don’t necessarily trust everything equally.

Agatha: No.

Interviewer: But it’s familiar and you go to it.

Agatha: Yes. So, I think my trust was based on the content of what it was.

Interviewer: Then there’s that- Well, maybe more than one, but there’s something that is really unfamiliar but quite high-trust. Can you imagine what that might have been?

Agatha: (Laughter) I can’t remember.

Interviewer: Okay. Right, so, is there anything else you feel we’ve not covered that you want to discuss about what we’ve been talking about, or…?

Agatha: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Obviously, your little book is for you to take away. We talked about ChatGPT.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, it says on it anyway, but the inferences we made about you in the middle, about what sort of person you are, ChatGPT helped us do that.

Agatha: Okay.

Interviewer: It also wrote a poem about you.

Agatha: (Laughter) Right, okay. About me?

Interviewer: It wrote a poem about you based on- Because we know so much about you, right, because you told us what you read for two weeks.

Agatha: Yes.

Interviewer: So, there’s a poem there and I can’t take any credit for that poem, apart from asking it to be done in a certain style and giving it the information to base it on.

Agatha: Oh, right, okay.

Interviewer: So, just because you talked about ChatGPT’s use in the university, I thought you might…

Agatha: (Laughter) Wow.

Interviewer: So, there you go. Not only can it win an art competition, maybe it could win a poetry competition too. (Laughter)

Agatha: Wow. My brother’s a poet. I’ll have to show it to him.

Interviewer: Do you recognise yourself in the poem?

Agatha: ‘In a worse of diverse interests they reside.’ (Laughter) That’s not particularly personal. There are bits, but then it mentions K-pop. Yes. Bits and pieces. It says, ‘Tech savvy.’ I don’t think that’s true.

Interviewer: (Laughter) Yes, it has picked out the K-pop and the sport, both of which you told me you’re not really interested in.

Agatha: (Laughter) Yes. Oh, but it does say, ‘Indigenous triumphs [ \_\_\_ 1:10:07].’ That’s all stuff that I really believe in.

Interviewer: Good. If you believe in it, then it’s good again. It’s a genius, yes.

Agatha: I’ll pick out all the words that I like on there.

END AUDIO

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