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START AUDIO

Interviewer: Okay. So the first question refers to page four in your book. It just shows the times of day you shared stuff with us. So what I want you to do is, basically, have a look at that and see if you think that seems about right and if it’s, kind of, typical.

Florence: Yes. I think… It’s like when you get to the afternoon and you’re a bit sluggish. I think, basically, that’s probably when I get most distracted. Not that news is a distracting thing but, I think, that’s probably when I consume most of the news I consume, especially online during the afternoon, because it’s like trying to break up your day I suppose. I feel like I have a more productive morning and then, in the afternoon, things slow down a bit. That’s probably why I distract myself more by looking at news sources online and stuff. So, yes, I think that’s pretty accurate.

Interviewer: I know you started to do that, then. Would you mind just talking me through that day, as it were?

Florence: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: And just talking about- For each of the things that are highlighted on there, talk about what that might be, how you might access online news, what devices you’re using-

Florence: Yes, I basically only really use my phone to look at news. A lot of the news I look at isn’t really news as well, it’s just like kind of online articles that I wouldn’t consider very factually important or accurate but it’s kind of like clickbait stuff, embarrassingly. I think, normally, I don’t really consume much news early morning because… I feel like, when I get up, I check notifications that are more personal to me. In the morning, I might just see things that have come up overnight that are news-related.

Then, in the afternoon, it’s more like a distraction thing rather than… So I probably would consume more clickbait, less actually factually accurate stuff, in the afternoon, as opposed to the morning. I feel like, in the morning, I’ll… Things that people have sent me overnight or whatever, that’s probably when I’m checking that stuff.

Then, in the evening, I do doom scroll a bit. Yes, I probably get most, if not all, of my news from Twitter really. I think that’s my main source of accessing news. I, kind of, mostly do that in the afternoon to evening time.

I think it’s mostly, in the morning and early morning, stuff that other people have sent me, normally. Then, in the afternoon and evening, it’s stuff that I’ve found while scrolling mindlessly through social media. So, yes, it seems quite-

Interviewer: Is that mainly Twitter, you say?

Florence: Yes, pretty much just Twitter.

Interviewer: You mentioned people sending you things, so what form does that take?

Florence: Oh yes. To be fair, because I mostly talk to people on Snapchat really, like people my age, and that’s how I communicate with my parents as well so, if they send me news articles and stuff, it’s probably through Snapchat. I click on that and then go to the website, I guess. That will be less…

Doing the diary, I realise that I read a lot of… Maybe in like an envy way, I read a lot of people breaking down their spending over a week, which I’m kind of embarrassed by, I think that’s something I shouldn’t really be interested in but… Arguably, not really news either but I read a lot of that kind of stuff. Yes, if people send me things, it’s normally on Snapchat. Then people might be having a discussion on a group chat or something, then I’ll read it and then say my piece but-

Interviewer: Okay. So how…? Excuse my ignorance, but how do you get sent something on Snapchat?

Florence: It’s just like a copied and pasted link.

Interviewer: So is it like a direct message?

Florence: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. And that would be a link to something on Snapchat or would that be a link to an external site?

Florence: Yes, an external site so… I mean I mainly get news from the ‘Guardian’ or the ‘BBC’. Yes, usually that kind of thing. My mum normally sends me ‘BBC’ articles, that’s through Snapchat as well. So it would be a link to an external site.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you noticed any changes, over time, in that kind of consumption habit, have you changed how you access news or the amount of time you spend reading news over time?

Florence: Yes, I think I used to read news, before the pandemic, a lot more than I do now. I was 16/17/18 just before the pandemic happened. I think, during the… Leading up to COVID hitting, I was really obsessed with reading news reports and stuff. Then I think, over 2020 and 2021 I stopped. I guess for like the sake of, just, headspace. I stopped consuming so much media. I deleted actual news apps from my phone which, I think, was kind of silly because I do quite like…

I’d quite like to buy newspapers and read them, it’s just expensive and I feel like I wouldn’t actually do that even though I’d have the ambition to.

I think I definitely stopped reading news as much as I did when I was younger. I think also, after graduating uni last year, I feel like I just have started consuming less, actually, factually-relevant or important news. It’s mainly just clickbait things that take up less thinking. They’re quite easy to consume and not actually have to form an opinion on, which is quite sad but I don’t know. It’s, kind of, not really helped my… I don’t know. I don’t feel like it’s really changed my happiness levels or whatever.

I think it was quite good when I was reading a lot of news because I was more informed about things and I could actually hold a conversation with someone, that I didn’t know a lot about, just by talking about things that we’d both read about in the news. Now I just don’t really know that much anymore, which is quite sad. At the same time, I’m not doing anything to change that, I’m not reading more news or more…

I keep saying factually-relevant or important or true because I think a lot of the stuff I consume is, kind of, disguised as a news article but it’s just random people’s opinions about things that aren’t really real. I don’t know.

Interviewer: Okay, well let’s talk about that. So you said clickbait news.

Florence: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you mind just explaining what that is?

Florence: Just not like things that are hate-inciting or anything, but just like things that are kind of like masquerading as important news but it’s just, “Here’s what I eat in a week.” or like, “Here is what I spend in a week.” or, “Here is…”

Like I’m not a royalist or anything, and I don’t really keep up to date with- I don’t really know anything about the royal family but I did notice, when I was doing the diary, that I read a couple of articles that were related to the royal family, I think. I read Megan, (Laughter) so I’m assuming… Which is kind of just not very… Like, it’s not really fitting with my personality but it’s just quite easy things to consume. I feel like it gets to the point where these people aren’t actually… They don’t feel like real people, they feel fictional, which is really sad.

I think people should be entitled to privacy in their lives, so why don’t I just ignore articles that are talking about-? Like why don’t I actually follow what I believe ethically? I don’t know. It’s just like an easy way to shut off your mind to actually thinking about having to process an opinion on stuff, and just read about other people, I suppose. It’s quite depressing but…

Interviewer: I don’t mean to depress you with this.

Florence: (Laughter) It’s alright, I was already aware of it.

Interviewer: Do you tend to…? With these clickbait articles, do you tend to spend a lot of time reading full articles, do you read a lot of just headlines, how does that work?

Florence: I’ll start reading it, then I’ll probably get annoyed and then just stop reading half way through. I’ll be like, “I should not be wasting my time doing this, I’ve got better things to do.” Especially… Like, I don’t do this that much at work but sometimes I will start just reading random stuff at work and I’m like, “Well I actually have tasks to do, I should be doing those instead.”

As you were talking about earlier, how much data people have, like news companies and stuff or I don’t know… Like social media, I suppose, especially have, knowing exactly what kinds of things you will click on based on stuff you’ve already clicked on. I feel like you get, kind of, trapped in this. They know exactly what you will read, they know exactly what headlines will catch your attention and get you to click on them. I feel like… I’m like, “Yes, I know why they’re promoting this to me, they know I’ll click on it.” I still click on it, so it’s like an endless cycle.

Interviewer: So those topics that you just talked about, the things that they know you’ll click on, and the stuff you’ve already mentioned, why do you think you do tend to gravitate towards those topics and issues?

Florence: Yes, I suppose it’s like escapism. Although a lot of the things I, also, read- Because I work in an industry, kind of, adjacent to architecture, and I studied architecture, so I feel like I’m quite interested in urban dynamics, as it says here. Kind of like cities, architecture, design, so I will read a lot of more… I don’t want to say if things are important or not but more actually important I think, in the grand scheme of things, articles about cities and urban design and housing issues and stuff, which is good.

Yes, it’s funny it says animal behaviour. I don’t really have any interest in animals but maybe I was reading some animal-related… This is quite funny. Llamas, I don’t remember reading about llamas but maybe I did.

Interviewer: Yes, llamas, animals, parrots.

Florence: Maybe it’s just like a subconscious interest in animals?

Interviewer: [ \_\_\_ 00:11:01], yes.

Florence: Yes, I feel like… I’m a vegetarian and I try to be ethical towards animals but I don’t really care about them.

Interviewer: Yes, don’t even think people that eat meat eat parrots and llamas but… (Laughter)

Florence: I don’t know.

Interviewer: Yes, true. So how often do you encounter online news and information that you think is fake or misleading?

Florence: I do feel like I steer away from websites like the ‘Daily Mail’ and the ‘Sun’, I don’t… I really don’t think they’re ethical sites, and I think they exploit people and don’t fit with my political views so… I think, because I have avoided going on sites like that for so long, they’re the main people that share… I think they’re people that share inaccurate, knowingly misleading people, news. I think the stuff I consume that’s not like…

By not factually accurate, I mean it’s not important. It’s just like what someone spent in a week. That’s not like news, I don’t actually think it’s important news. It’s just because the website is set up like a news website and the article looks like an article and it’s someone reporting on it as if it is news, I’m tricked into thinking it is. Like I’m consuming news, I think, but I don’t… Yes, I think I find it quite easy to tell when… I can be quite sceptical of facts that are… Well I like to think, maybe I’m not. That are obviously not true, they obviously haven’t researched the content that they’re providing well or…

Also, I think, because I do get fed, almost exclusively, all of my news through Twitter, often it’s the person sharing it that’s sharing an inaccurate opinion or an inaccurate fact to do with the news article, not the news article itself. So, I don’t know. I’m not great at identifying when things are obviously misleading or fake but I think I’m alright at it. I am quite sceptical when I read stuff. Especially because, most of what I read, I’m kind of aware it’s kind of bullshit. It’s obviously trying to get you to just click on it so they can get more advertising revenue so they can keep on producing articles that aren’t really important to anyone.

So, yes, I think I’m alright at it but I also think that’s because I’m quite sceptical because I do consume all my news through Twitter, which is notoriously just random people saying things on the internet, I suppose.

Interviewer: You mentioned sometimes, on Twitter, this kind of scepticism might come from because somebody else is sharing an article and adding their view, I suppose.

Florence: Yes.

Interviewer: So is that a common way you’ll encounter links to news articles?

Florence: Yes. I do follow the ‘Guardian’ and the ‘BBC’ on Twitter, so I do get some of it just like, “Here is an article we’ve just uploaded.” A lot of it, like I follow a lot of people in the academic sphere or, I don’t know, I guess like researchers and stuff. I’m more inclined to kind of… The people I actually follow, I’m more inclined to actually believe what they’re sharing or trust it more than when it’s just like…

I don’t really understand how Twitter is structured these days, but you know when it’s like recommended for you. I sometimes go on that column and it’s just like I, kind of, trust it a bit less because it’s not people I’m actually following. It’s not people I’ve made a conscious decision I trust what they share or I enjoy what they share, and therefore I’m going to engage and listen to the content that they’re sharing. I think I’m, more, recognising it’s fake or something, or more sceptical about it, when it is just stuff that the algorithm is recommending for you.

Interviewer: So the…? Yes, okay. So you said a lot of things, there, that I’m really interested in. I just need to speak about them one at a time.

Florence: Okay. (Laughter)

Interviewer: So let’s start with the general thing. So how do you feel about the role of Twitter in disseminating news?

Florence: I think it’s been great in getting people that don’t normally consume news to access it. I think personally, because I did used to go on news apps and news websites and stuff and actively read through it, I’ve kind of used Twitter to substitute that a bit. As a result, I don’t actually consume news as much as I used to at all. Like a fraction. So I think it’s good for some people who might not normally read news and stuff but, personally, I think it’s made it… I’m just so overwhelmed with all of the content that you can always scroll through. It’s from so many different sources, it’s like… I don’t really click on most of it because I think it…

Yes, I feel like it’s also like I just read headlines more than the actual news articles now. When I was using news apps or website it would be like, “Oh, that sounds interesting.” I’d click on it. Now I’m just like, “There’re so man headlines from so many different places.” Often, they’re all kind of conflicting. I don’t really follow them as much. I’ll follow, maybe, 5% of the tweets that I see sharing a news article. Whereas I used to click on the majority of headline, front page, articles on the ‘BBC’ news app or something.

Interviewer: So do you think accessing news through social media, versus the apps, does that affect your trust?

Florence: Trust, definitely, and I also think just the… It feels like there’s more quantity because it’s not like a consistent format. If you’re just accessing news from one provider, it’s all a consistent, branded, format. Whereas, on Twitter it’s such a mishmash of different website, different people sharing them, different people sharing different opinions about… Then you’re getting the same news article from all these different websites, it’s like…

It feels like it’s, on one hand, less trustworthy but also it feels like, in a way, you’ve read all of the news, even though all you’ve done is read the headlines, because you’ve been bombarded with a similar version of the headline so many times just when scrolling. It’s like, “Well I already know that news.” even if you haven’t read any of the details about it and it might just be a misleading headline. So I feel like it makes you consume news in a much shallower way, at least for me personally.

I guess it depends on how you curate your Twitter feed and stuff, because if you’re following… Or how you view Twitter as like… I see it as more- Initially, I saw it as more of like an entertainment channel. As I’ve gone to university and stuff, it’s become more of like a… Not professional but like… I want to engage with academics and researchers and stuff, and share research I’ve done, so it’s become more like a, I guess, professional thing. So then I’ve shifted who I follow, to less entertainment, to more, I don’t know, people that share news. (Laughter)

Too much news and yes, as I say, it just feels like you’re engaging with a lot of stuff but it’s all so shallow and you don’t actually read any of the actual content because you’re just scrolling I suppose.

Interviewer: How important is it to you that the news that you do consume comes from a trusted source?

Florence: Yes, when doing the diary, every day I’d be really thinking about how I view this question, I think, because I will just consume news from all different sources as long as it’s not like a website that I actively don’t want to give advertising money to. So not really…

Like, I think, if I’m going to actually consciously consume news and listen to what it’s saying, and form an opinion based on it, then it’s important that I trust it. If I’m just like, “I’ve had a long day and I want to just read some rubbish.” then I don’t really care if it’s trustworthy because, in my head, it’s just like a story that’s not really relevant to me anyway. I suppose it’s relevant but so remote that it’s just like, yes, escapism I guess.

I think it’s a bit like that with stories that I feel… Even stories from the ‘BBC’ and the ‘Guardian’ that are about animal behaviour, for example, I don’t find that particularly important to me but it’s just like, “Oh, this is kind of interesting.” Not in, necessarily, like a learning kind of way but in like a, “Oh, isn’t it crazy that animals can do this.” I guess.

Interviewer: I know you said it’s not important to you if something is trustworthy but you do recognise that some things are more trustworthy, so I wonder if… How do you determine if something is trustworthy or not?

Florence: I guess, mostly, it’s from the website that… I, kind of, consume everything just through websites. I wouldn’t say that I’d read… I guess if you…

Twitter is so short form. I guess now there’re verified users being able to write as much as they want or whatever but, conventionally, it’s quite a short form website so you’re not going to be reading a tweet like, “Wow, that’s my news article.” So all the content I really consume is through websites. I don’t really read any print newspapers or anything. So I feel like it will be based on like…

I don’t actually think the ‘BBC’ is that trustworthy but, as far as trustworthy goes, it’s pretty trustworthy if that makes sense. I understand that it is, essentially, swayed by the government and censored by the government and stuff, maybe. So I’m sceptical, still, but I will trust the ‘BBC’ and the ‘Guardian’ way more than ‘Refinery29’ or the Sydney Morning Herald. I don’t know why I read something from there but… All of the like… You know, like the Chronicle and the local news websites and stuff, I feel like a lot of that is just like, “This isn’t news.”

If it’s like an article about a man whose dog has eaten his season ticket or something like this, it’s not news. Why is this being put on a news website?

So I will trust local news, I think, less than the nicely branded- Like the ‘Guardian’ or the ‘BBC’ but… Yes, I think I’m quite sceptical of most news but I will still… It’s like I’m sceptical, I say I’m sceptical, but then I’m like, “Yes, I’m taking this as fact.” So I can’t actually find it that sceptical, I am just trusting it. It’s quite scary, I think, if you think about how much of your news is…

Because I can be like, “Yes, I’m not trusting this.” but it’s still informing my worldview and I’ll still regurgitate these things that I read in a news article to people in conversation. Yes, I can form my own opinions on it but I’m just forming opinions that are based on the news article. If the news article is inaccurate or wrong then my opinion isn’t really based on any substance, which is kind of scary. I suppose that’s just…

I mean before we had newspapers, like centuries ago, it was just people saying things so, I guess, at least it’s slightly fact checked in a way. A bit cross-referenced, I don’t know.

Interviewer: Okay. So the main determinant for you, really, is…? You mentioned the websites, you’re essentially saying what comes after www.?

Florence: Yes, if it’s like one of those nationwide really well-funded, good like… Good investigative journalism, I don’t know, like… It’s got a good reputation, I suppose.

Interviewer: Okay. I wonder then, if you could- Because you’ve mentioned clickbait, these ones that look like news sites, etc. Could you just give an example or two of what comes to mind when you’re thinking of those types of websites?

Florence: Well I think ‘Refinery29’. I don’t even know what kind of website that is because I only really consume things that I read on Twitter. I feel like I’m being… I get bombarded with ‘Mumsnet’ these days. It’s really weird, I don’t know how I’ve got onto the ‘Mumsnet’ algorithm but they’ve got such good clickbait advertising because you’ll read a headline and be-

I know it’s not like an actual headline, it’s just a forum, but you’ll read and it will be like, “How can someone even put this on the internet?” Then it’s like, “Well I want to know what they’ve said, so I’m going to click on it.” I know that’s a forum rather than a news outlet but… Yes, I don’t know how I got onto ‘Mumsnet’. How ‘Mumsnet’ thinks that I’m… Yes, but they have some juicy stuff on there so maybe that’s why.

Yes, I can’t think of any other examples. I guess ‘Bon Appétit’. I don’t know what that is, I guess it’s like ‘Refinery29’ but for food.

Interviewer: So what is ‘Refinery29’? I’ve never heard of it.

Florence: I don’t know. I think it’s like a… They publish things like, “I make an obscene amount of money, this is what I spend in a week” or, “This is what I eat in a week” or that kind of stuff. It’s like… Or like, “These are the top ten notebooks you should buy this year” or that kind of stuff. It’s a bit like YouTube but in a website that’s pretending to be a news organisation, I guess.

You know, like ‘BuzzFeed’. Yes, ‘BuzzFeed’, I’d say, is the other thing because most of that is just… I don’t know if it still exists. I feel like I used to consume a lot of ‘BuzzFeed’ when I was 12 or 13 or 14.

Interviewer: I think they sacked all their reporters and really shrank, yes.

Florence: I mean that’s most news websites these days. I wouldn’t actually call ‘BuzzFeed’ a news website but… Yes, ‘BuzzFeed’, ‘Refinery29’, that kind of stuff, it’s like pretending that it’s news and I guess it is news. I don’t really know what news is.

Interviewer: Good. Okay, so the source, the website, is a really important determining factor for you?

Florence: Yes. I wish I was at the stage where I could recognise journalists’ names and then I could be like, “Oh, this journalist does good articles.” but I don’t read enough news to recognise different journalists. I guess, if I did read five or ten times the amount of news I currently read, then I’d probably also base it on the journalist.

I know, in local media, there are journalists I really don’t like. I guess I also recognise that locally, but I guess that’s easier to do because there’s a chance you’ll actually bump into people or meet people at events that are local journalists. Nationally, I feel like… Like I don’t know what a good journalist at the ‘Guardian’ is, for example. I, kind of, just read everything they- Anything they put before me, I’ll be like, “Yes, that’s probably accurate.” I don’t know, it feels pretty bad.

Interviewer: No, I think that’s… You know, that’s what we’re trying to figure out, how people make sense of this and put it… You know, how far people need to go to get that trust and…

What about…? You mentioned, before, who shares it with you. So you said you’ve got some people that you follow on Twitter that share a news story. You know, that’s just their opinion or whatever but, you know… Would that affect how much you might trust something? Even if it wasn’t from the ‘Guardian’ but somebody you knew shared it, how might that play out?

Florence: Yes. It’s not even people I know personally, it’s people that I’m aware of on the internet and I like their stuff. So, yes, I’m more likely to trust it if it’s something shared by them. Also, because, you know, like a percentage of my news comes from things that have been shared by friends and family- Well, basically, out of my family, the only person I really contact is my mum, so things my mum sends. We talk a lot, she is like… (Laughter) She’s a funny person but I feel like she’ll send me… She sends me quite a lot of news articles that I read.

Then my friends are also quite politically… I don’t know, quite engaged in the cultural discourse and stuff so they will tend to share news articles in a group chat and be like, “What do you guys think about this?” which is quite funny, in a way, but also really good. I think it’s good that I have conversations with my friends that are about what’s going on.

I also thought it was interesting, look at this, that I either don’t do anything or discuss things that I consume online, I suppose news I consume. I think that’s quite accurate, I don’t really ever share. Occasionally I’ll send a link, to something, to someone that might be interested but I really rarely share- I never share news on Twitter or a public social media platform, I only really use Twitter. I’ll occasionally send a link to someone but mostly I’m consuming it rather than sharing it, or like I’ll…

By discuss, I mean I’ll send someone a message being like, “Oh, thanks for sharing this with me, this is what I think, what do you think?” I talk about things that I’ve read quite a lot, just person to person. Like in-person, I mean, not online.

Interviewer: Okay. You said you don’t really share stuff on social media but you will share stuff in-

Florence: Private.

Interviewer: Group chats.

Florence: Yes.

Interviewer: WhatsApp?

Florence: No, like on Snapchat. It’s like-

Interviewer: Snapchat?

Florence: I was having a conversation about why I use Snapchat with my friends. It’s because one of our friends, the only social media platform she has is Snapchat which is strange because she’s older than me. I feel like it’s the platform that like- My brother is 16 or 17, I feel like it’s the platform their generation uses, not like… I find it so strange, I don’t like Snapchat at all. It’s like a platform- It’s just because my closest friend uses it and it’s the only one she uses so she’s like… She’s the only one that makes plans and stuff so it’s like everyone is, as a result, on Snapchat even though they don’t want to be. You’re just trapped on this platform no one likes.

I do use WhatsApp, occasionally, to communicate with work colleagues or… I’ve got a couple of friends that don’t really use social media but they do have WhatsApp, so I’ll contact them through that. I don’t really share news, I don’t share any articles or anything through it.

The same with texting. I don’t really text anymore, which is strange, but I also don’t really share any news articles. It’s, literally, just on Snapchat, which is so strange.

I think it’s strange that I only communicate with my mum on Snapchat as well, because she is almost 50 and she’s just really into Snapchat. She doesn’t talk to anyone apart from me, she literally just has it to communicate with me. I’m like, “You could just text me.” but she… I don’t know. She doesn’t really know how to use it properly but I think she likes the fact she can see my location, that’s probably the only reason. Yes. I’m trapped on Snapchat, which is great.

I don’t really use Facebook and I don’t have Instagram or anything so… I suppose you don’t really… I remember when I had Instagram, people didn’t really share actual news stories. It was just those aesthetic, like, “Here is this horrible wall going on, here are all the details.” It’s on like an aesthetic background of flowers and stuff. So it was just a really weird juxtaposition of like, “This is horrific news, why have you put it in a really nice font and decorated it with hand-drawn flowers?” Yes, I don’t miss Instagram, I feel like it’s very strange.

I think getting news from Instagram was also just like… Most of that was just completely fake and rubbish because it was hard to share links, I guess, so you couldn’t really validate any of the sources that people shared news from but I don’t really know.

Interviewer: Okay. Let’s talk about discussing first, and then we’ll talk about validating. Good. So, yes, you mentioned that that you will discuss things in real life.

Florence: Real life like… Yes.

Interviewer: We have to… Yes-

Florence: You have to make the differentiation these days.

Interviewer: Yes, you’ll discuss things in real life with people based on stuff you’ve read online?

Florence: Yes. Literally, it’s so bad. The other day, I found myself saying, “Can we talk about this IRL?” It’s like how embarrassing. Yes, I think, yes, I’ll… It’s just like I quite enjoy… I’m quite an opinionated person, I feel. I think it’s quite enjoyable to like… I feel like, when I was growing up, so much of the conversations I had was like, “Who is dating who?” like personal social gossip.

It’s nice that, now, I’m friends with people who will be like, “What do you think about this thing that’s happening in the city?” Quite a lot of the stuff I discuss with people, because I work in a gallery but for architecture and planning so we get a lot of people who come in and talk about planning applications that are happening and like… I feel like I’m quite well informed about local design and stuff like that, just because of having… Then my opinions are developed because I have so many conversations about them with people that I interact with every day, which I think is nice.

I wish I did consume more news because I feel, then, I would feel more confident talking about things with people I don’t know. I feel like I will just, not lie or make stuff up but I will kind of, assume I’m right when I’m talking to my friends and stuff but when I’m talking to strangers I’m like, “I don’t know what your… You might be a complete expert in this field that I’m talking about. I can’t just think something might be right so I’ll say it.” but yes-

Interviewer: The thing about talking to your friends about news or stuff that you’ve read online, how would that be instigated, might somebody share something?

Florence: I think online, if we’re talking about stuff, it will be someone will share a link and then they’ll be a resulting discussion or maybe… Sometimes I’ll share a link and then no one will reply. I’m like, “Okay, so that’s embarrassing.” Yes, normally it will be someone shares a link.

If it’s in person, I think it’s just like a… You’ll be walking past somewhere, it’ll be like, “Oh, have you heard about what thing is happening there?” or we’ll just be having a discussion about something. It’ll be like, “Oh, this is like this thing that I read, what do you think about this? I’ll summarise this news article and then say it, then you can say your opinion.” Like that kind of thing.

I also feel like I do read a lot of the same articles as my mum and my step-dad and then, also, my closest friends as well. So I feel like we all have quite similar points of reference of like, “Did you read this piece?” “Oh yes, this is what I think about it. Oh yes, this is what I think about it.” Actually, something that…

I guess it’s not really news-based but I’ve started to listen to a lot more podcasts because I’ve got a friend that has very good taste in like, “This is a specific episode I think you’ll like.” So I’ll listen to things on recommendation, which I suppose is sort of news I guess. I listen to like… You know, like Mona Chalabi’s data journalism kind of stuff?

Interviewer: I’m not aware of it but…

Florence: She’s a really cool data journalist. I think she does stuff for the New York Times but she also has a podcast, I think, in combination with TED. What do I mean? A collaboration with TED that’s really cool, so it’s kind of like relevant news but here are the data facts behind it. Yes, that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Have you ever made a decision, or taken an action, based on something you read online?

Florence: Probably, unconsciously. I don’t think I’ve ever been like, “What shall I do now? Let me think about a ‘BBC’ article I read last week.” but I think, probably like… I mean all of the news that you consume makes up your opinions or contributes to what you think about things or… So, yes, probably, I think…

Again, not really like news but I feel like I’ve been, recently, more interested in investing and kind of financial- Just as an example, like… I don’t do investing, because I don’t have any money to invest, but I’ve become more interested in investing and, I suppose, like… Yes, I guess investing as a concept which is based on all of the news that I’ve read. I imagine, if I had money, I would be like, “Well I’ve consumed a lot of news about investing in stocks and stuff, maybe I would invest my money.” That’s a decision I might make based on news that I’ve consumed. I can’t think of anything I’ve actually done but I imagine that would be an example of a…

Yes, I mean, I think, indirectly, definitely, news that I consume will affect the decisions I make, I just can’t think of any examples.

Interviewer: Well similarly, but different, have you ever changed your mind about something based on something you’ve read online?

Florence: Yes, I guess, probably. I can’t think of any examples. Yes, I suppose in the vain of like… I don’t even think it’s changing my mind on something. I think it’s like I’ll develop an opinion based on something I read. I can’t think of any examples though.

I think I’m quite bad because, once I have an opinion, it’s quite hard to change it. I think, even if I did read… I don’t know. I guess like… Okay, this is such a weird example but I guess like…

Do you remember, a couple of years ago, when it came out that Oatly, the oat milk brand, is invested in by Blackstone? Yes, I remember being like, “Wow.” I wasn’t like tattooing Oatly over my body and stuff but I was like, “It’s a good brand, I’d buy that.” I drink oat milk so I was like, “I buy that brand and stuff.” Then, when I read news about how it’s actually quite… They’ve got ties to people that are quite environmentally unfriendly, which is in complete contradiction to their whole advertising. I was like, “Wow, maybe I shouldn’t like this brand anymore.”

So, I guess, actually brands- Like I definitely change my mind on brands, and stuff, based on news that I read about them. I guess that’s the key example. So it definitely affects my purchases, and stuff, I’d say but I can’t think of…

I think, on social issues, I’m quite like… I’ll read stuff and then develop an opinion on it and be like, “This is my opinion.” Obviously, it will change but it would be more likely to change after conversations with people rather than things I read online.

Interviewer: Great. Do you ever, when you read stuff online, go and try to find alternative sources to kind of verify or fact check?

Florence: I mean I’d like to. I’m sure I have done but not regularly, which is bad. I think it’s because of how news is presented to you. When you’re just consuming it through Twitter, for example, because it’s so fast paced it’s like, “Okay, I’ve read this now. Right, move onto the next thing.”

Also, because of how I consume news as, not an interruption but like, a distraction in my day. I’m not sitting down and being like, “This is my hour to consume news.” It’s like, “I have five minutes spare or I’m commuting somewhere or I just want to look at content before I go to sleep to stop thinking about stuff or I’ve just woken up, I need to look at a screen so I can wake up.” It’s kind of like phone addiction, I guess, but I feel like I do… They will be the times when I consume media, like news media, rather than… I’ve never been like, “Right, I’m going to sit down and block out this time to research news.” It’s always drip-fed into my day, where convenient, as a distraction or something to do.

Interviewer: Okay. Have you ever stopped following a certain sources of news or online source because you stopped trusting it for some reason?

Florence: Again, probably. I think… I mean, often, it will come out that certain journalists, or stuff, have transphobic or, I don’t know, very right wing views and I’ll be like, “Okay, well that’s a source that I don’t agree with. Therefore I don’t want to consume or support media that they create.” Again, I can’t think of any examples.

It’s probably happened as, kind of, an unconscious decision process where it’s like, “Well I don’t agree with you about this fundamental part of my identity.” Not identity but like values, set of values, I guess.

Interviewer: Your belief system, yes, yes.

Florence: Yes, yes. So, therefore… Yes, definitely, therefore the stuff that you’re writing is always going to be subliminally affected by that and therefore I don’t want to consume media that you’re producing. So I think it’s more like an individual thing, based on a journalist, rather than a news outlet.

Interviewer: Can you think of an example when that’s happened, even if it’s not specific?

Florence: No.

Interviewer: How might you come to that decision that you no longer want to follow a specific journalist, would it be something you directly see from them or might it be-?

Florence: Yes. Or just kind of, I guess, not allegations but just like discourse online. I guess, also… I mean that’s probably happened in, like, a news outlet as a whole. I guess, actually, yes, when… Quite recently, when different… I can’t remember what it was. So many news organisations are majorly cutting their workforces at the moment, which is something I understand but disagree with. I don’t think…

My friend works for a big tech company. Her friends keep getting made redundant. I feel quite lucky that I work in an industry where that’s not that common, but I also… Yes, ethically, I think that, obviously, you shouldn’t just use people as if they’re kind of disposable. When you’re suddenly not making enough profit, you’re like, “Right, the first people to go will be the people that work for me.”

So I think that has, kind of, made me more angry, I suppose, with certain… Again, I can’t really remember but like I’ll see on Twitter journalists being like, “I’ve lost my job. This is the last week I’ll be working at this place.” Then I’ll be like, “Okay, so that company clearly doesn’t prioritise its workers.” which is something I don’t agree with. So I’ll probably, subconsciously, consume less of the media that they’re putting out.

Interviewer: Okay. I’ve got a couple more questions around trust stuff. Then I’m going to talk specifically around the idea of the algorithms and stuff like that, okay?

Florence: The fun stuff? (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, yes, hopefully. So I just wonder if your trust in news, and online information, has been affected by major events such as big awareness of disinformation campaigns and things like that. Do you think those things have affected the way you trust news?

Florence: Yes. I feel like, I don’t know, five years ago I would’ve been like, “Yes, the ‘BBC’ is gospel, they’re completely unbiased.” Then, as things have come out about stuff being censored by the government or journalists being swayed by people they know in the cabinet or whatever, I’m like, “Okay, so now I’m aware that the ‘BBC’ is…”

I saw something today, it was like… Yes, it was about, you know, the whole… Sorry I keep knocking the table. The Jamie- Is his name Jamie Discroll? I can’t remember, but the mayor for the North of Tyneside who got-

Interviewer: Yes.

Florence: They were like, “You’re not on the ballot again.” because of his affiliation with Ken Loach, partly. Then there was this thing and it was like this tweet I saw. Everything is just a tweet I’ve seen, which is bad. It was like- So the ‘BBC’, this morning, shared a podcast which was an interview with Ken Loach. Then, three hours later, they were like, “Ken Loach is an anti-Semite and we’re not going to…” This is the whole drama going on with the mayoral elections.

It’s like you have to choose a side, kind of, although I understand they can’t choose a side because it’s the ‘BBC’. In a way, it’s like, “Make your mind up what your output is going to be, because if you think he’s an anti-Semite then don’t broadcast an interview with him.” Yes, I think that kind of juxtaposition within a huge organisation like the ‘BBC’, I suppose that makes you trust them less because it’s like you’re condemning your own news in a way.

That was a really bad explanation of a tweet but that kind of thing, I think. Yes, definitely, if something comes out about a news organisation then I’ll be like, “Okay, I probably should trust what they’re saying less.” although I will still trust it because I don’t have any backbone. I don’t know, like… (Laughter) I say I don’t trust it…

Interviewer: Yes, okay. So what about technologically-driven stuff, so AI-generated content, of which there’s- That [poem 00:48:31] on the back of [Crosstalk]-

Florence: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: AI-generated content and, also, kind of like deep fakes, manipulated images, how does that kind of stuff affect your trust in news?

Florence: Well I think, luckily, at the moment AI is quite a… I know people are like, “AI is amazing, you can convince anything.” I think, in some cases, it’s well done but I think, mostly, it’s quite obvious when something is AI-generated or…

Yes, my friend was- She showed me this message that her grandpa had sent her. It was a picture of a baby peacock and it was so clearly fake. It was just so clearly not real. He was like, “Did you know this is what baby peacocks look like?” She was like, “Oh, grandpa, no, that’s a fake image.” Like that kind of… It is quite sad because I feel like my generation are probably quite good at telling when things are AI-generated but then I forget, sometimes, that if you didn’t grow up with the internet or are quite old you could probably just believe anything that people tell you, or a lot of people, which is really sad.

So, I think, while I’m on my high horse like, “Yes, I could definitely tell. Anything that was written by an AI-source is fake.” It’s not necessarily true. I do think that, in the majority of cases, where news outlets are writing news… Firstly, I probably wouldn’t be reading their stuff anyway because it’s probably not a website that I would trust in the first place. Also, I think it’s quite obvious when you are using it to write stuff.

Interviewer: You think it will affect people’s ability to verify?

Florence: Yes, definitely. I think it’s quite dangerous, really. I mean, personally, I think that, for now, I’m quite good at spotting when something is fake but, going into the future, if things keep improving at this rate then, I don’t know, maybe not. Maybe it will be really hard to tell. I guess we’ll just have to see.

Interviewer: Okay. So that’s, sort of, the theme of questions now. How comfortable are you with the use of algorithms to personalise your newsfeeds?

Florence: Not comfortable, I think it’s very sinister. I think… Then, again, I just keep using… I think if I was like, “Yes, I completely disagree with all of this.” then I would just not use social media. I feel such a need to use social media that that goes above my belief that it’s not good, so I can’t be that convicted in my dislike of it.

You know on iPhone when it’s like, “Do you want this app to track your use on it?” I’ll always be like, “No, don’t make advertising more personal to me.” So, yes, I’m not very comfortable with it but, at the same time, clearly not uncomfortable enough to not use it. If it was really bothering me then I-

It’s the same thing with my data. I’m like, “Well…” It would be so easy to get any personal data about me but I’m not a very interesting person and I don’t do anything illegal or interesting. I’m not a public figure, so I don’t really mind that much. Then, I guess, it’s like when people can…

If people wanted to steal the not very much money I had in my bank account, they wouldn’t really bother because the effort to go to get my personal financial details and do that is not really worth the output. So I’m not bothered at the moment but, I guess, if I was a public figure or something it would be something that would concern me a lot, the fact that it would be quite easy to acquire all of this data about someone.

Interviewer: So have you ever been concerned about the use of your personal data by a website?

Florence: I’ve been concerned by it but not enough to not use it.

Interviewer: Do you take any steps to address those concerns, do you…? You mentioned you use the stuff on your iPhone to stop cookies tracking.

Florence: Yes.

Interviewer: What about the GDPR popups, do you engage with them in any way?

Florence: No, I think… This isn’t just the internet in general but I have called organisations out for not… For example, I was filling in this thing for… I’m moving house, so I filled in a letting reference form. Their GDPR was not being adhered to, they could see the data you were putting in before you agreed, “I agree for you to use my data.” which is terrible. So I was like, “Change this or I will be reporting it to…” I don’t know who deals with GDPR. I should do because I work in an organisation that gets you to do the training to tell you where to report breaches to. I was like, “This has to be changed because it’s illegal, basically.”

So I feel like I’m aware of it and I take steps but, personally, I’m a bit like, “I’m not a very important or interesting person. I don’t really mind that much if you get hold of my personal details.” I’m sure that, as I say, you could probably just find out everything about me quite easily if you knew how to do that kind of stuff. I don’t take that many personal actions.

Interviewer: You know you mentioned, earlier, about targeted advertising. Do you have any concerns around, not data being used for fraud, but for things of that nature?

Florence: Yes, well I hate advertising but, at the same time, I feel like I’m not… I’m quite a stingy person. I’ve never seen an advert and bought something because of it or… But at the same time, I guess, if adverts are like… What I was saying about ‘Mumsnet’ earlier, I do click on ‘Mumsnet’ adverts. Although I’m not, directly, giving them my money, they’re generating more income because they’re getting more clicks and therefore they can charge advertisers more to use their website. I suppose that is participating in advertising. So, yes, I’m not a fan of it but, at the same time, I still use the internet and I still use social media so… I try to ignore it as best as I can but not always.

Interviewer: So, beyond the fraud and advertising, obviously, one way that your personal data is used is to fine tune which news articles and stuff come up in your feed, which we’ve discussed already. I wonder what your thoughts are on the kind of… What are the impacts of that on this personalised, individual, exposure to information? What do you think the impacts are?

Florence: Yes. I guess it’s similar to cultivating your Twitter feed because it is just an echo chamber so you’re never going to be able to… Well it’s harder to access news articles that aren’t going to be something that you agree with or find relevant to you. So I suppose that’s quite dangerous, in a way, because you’re never being challenged, which is probably why very few of my opinions have changed by what I read on the internet, because it’s just content that reaffirms my opinions.

So I quite like it in a way, because it means that I’m not being shown content that’s going to make me really angry and it means I’m less likely to click on something that’s going to support, say, the ‘Sun’, which I ethically disagree with. So, in that sense, it’s good but I think… Yes, I’m not that bothered really. I think it’s a bit… I think it’s concerning but, personally, I’m not that bothered, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yes, yes. I guess, just to slightly change the angle of the question which you started talking about… What do you think are the impacts of that, I guess not just on you personally but just, on people being exposed to information in that way generally?

Florence: Yes, I think it makes people a lot more rigid in their opinions. Yes, it’s harder to challenge the data that you’ve been given if all of the articles that you’re being presented with support each other, even if it’s not on the same topic. So it’s kind of… It’s concerning because you’re never being encouraged to challenge stuff which, I think, makes people quite inflexible, which is bad. I suppose you lose critical thinking skills if you’re never being asked to challenge anything that you’re consuming. I guess it depends on the person and how they engage with media and stuff.

Interviewer: You said, just there, that you think it’s bad. I wonder if you could just explain about… Like in which way is it bad?

Florence: Well I just- Like if you have a society of people that never question things or who are completely secure in their own beliefs and stuff, then it kind of separates people into different… Like it’s hard for people to collaborate and work together. People are a lot angrier, I think, when they’re encountering people with different opinions to them, which I think is not very constructive as a society. (Laughter)

Especially seeing as we’re set up to have governments and stuff, most countries at least, but those governments… It’s more like, either, they reflect a group of people or they don’t reflect a group of people whose opinions you belong to, if that makes sense. So I think it’s not very conducive to a progressive society if everyone is just completely confident that their opinions are the only opinions, and they won’t have conversations with anyone else because they’re not used to people challenging what they think and stuff. Yes, I guess that’s what I think about it.

Interviewer: Nobody is right if everybody is wrong.

Florence: Yes.

Interviewer: Great. Not great but you know…

Florence: (Laughter)

Interviewer: Pulling away from that a little bit, but sticking with online news and newsfeeds and stuff, how do you feel about the level of objectivity in online news reporting? I think we’ve talked about the fact, already, there’s a difference between the way that people present news on social media versus in their own apps versus print, etc. So how do you feel about the level of objectivity?

Florence: What do you mean?

Interviewer: Objectivity, I mean in the sense of it being not an opinion but something which is presented as being objective or factual.

Florence: Oh right, yes.

Interviewer: I guess subjective would be, “Here is what I think.” versus, “Here is something that happened.”

Florence: Yes, yes, I think so much of the news that I consume is kind of opinion or it will present something that’s happened and be like, “This is my opinion.” I don’t know if that counts as news.

In terms of news that’s like, “Here is something that’s happened.” If it’s… I think, normally, it’s good for people to be informed about what’s happening, especially… Well everywhere, whether that’s global, national, or local.

I think the internet, as a way of sharing news, is really accessible to most people who are digitally literate and have access to the internet. I think that’s great. I think it’s a bit of a… Yes, I think it’s good that everyone has access. Obviously, I think it’s good that most of these websites are free. Although there are some paywalls, I feel like the paywalls are normally for opinion pieces and stuff. I think it’s good that most of the actual news reporting about, “This is what’s happening.” is free and accessible for people who can access the internet, which is good. Yes, I feel kind of good about that I think.

Interviewer: Okay.

Florence: I think, obviously, you can kind of twist… You can still twist objective news but it’s a bit harder to do, I guess. I mean, yes, as long as you’re not just like downright lying about something that happened and… I suppose you can back up a… I suppose that’s the issue. So many articles are just copied and pasted from other articles so it’s like, “This could be completely inaccurate information, it’s just been repasted.” So then you’re like, “Oh, well this other place says it.” It’s like, “Well both of these places are wrong, it’s just one of them has copied the other one.” So I think that’s the downside of the internet as well, it’s actually really hard to fact check things.

Interviewer: How important is it to you that the producers of online news are transparent about their sources and/or their methods of reporting?

Florence: Yes, I think it’s quite important. At the same time, I don’t actually read or understand about it. I think it’s important, if that is something that’s important to you, that you can access information about how data is gathered and stuff. I think that’s good.

Interviewer: Okay. We’ve talked a lot about the ‘BBC’ earlier on.

Florence: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think the ‘BBC’, as a state broadcaster, should be subject to different regulations and standards to privately-owned advertising revenue kind of news outlets?

Florence: Not necessarily. I think… Obviously, it’s really hard to police and it would be really expensive to police and stuff. I think it’s important that all media companies are held to scrutiny and stuff, obviously because… Well, yes, but I also think it’s most important that the ‘BBC’ is held to those standards seeing as it is… I don’t know, because you are… Even though, like…

Okay, so with the ‘BBC’, you’re paying your… I don’t actually really know how it’s funded. Either tax or your TV licence or whatever, that money is going into the ‘BBC’. Still, if you’re… Because of how our time is monetised these days, if you’re clicking on a news website and they’re making money from you reading it, on advertising, you’re still giving them money in a way. It’s just your time.

Interviewer: Yes.

Florence: So you’re still funding it, essentially, so it is still funded by the people that consume it. So I think that’s- Yes, that’s a really interesting question. I mean, yes, I think the ‘BBC’ should… I think everything should be held to a high standard but it’s most important that the ‘BBC’ is held to those standards because of how it is advertised as non-biased news broadcasting people. Everywhere else, obviously, has a pretty obvious political allegiance and stuff so you are kind of aware that it’s not going to be 100% nonbiased or whatever.

So, yes, not a very coherent answer but-

Interviewer: No, no, it was, it was. Okay, I just want to pick up on one thing you said before I ask my other question. Okay, so you referred to some news outlets are very obviously biased in certain ways. I wonder, how does one develop an awareness of that, how do we know that?

Florence: I think, for example, Sky is very, obviously, right-leaning. I guess you can figure it out because you know whoever owns the media corporation, you can just research what they think and say. It’s like, “If they’re choosing to invest in this or set this up, and stuff, then it’s obviously a reflection of their political opinions.” Sometimes it’s less obvious, I think.

I think it’s quite interesting, I grew up in Norwich and there’re two newspapers that are owned by the same company and are like the main local news. You’ve got the ‘EDP’, ‘Evening Daily Press’ I think, and then the ‘Norwich Evening News’. I think they’re the two. One of them is just, kind of like, a bit lefty and the other one is right but it’s all the same writers writing for both, it’s just different. You can, kind of, see that both of them put out the same article but with slightly different wording. It’s like, “Okay.” Not necessarily by the same journalist but the same story.

I think it is quite difficult. I think most of what I know about the allegiances of more mainstream news organisations is just from what my family have told me or my friends have told me or research I’ve done on the internet on Wikipedia or something. Yes, I think about it a lot more after watching ‘Succession’ actually, which is a bit random. Obviously, that’s all about having a global media empire. I think it’s interesting that’s encouraged me to think a lot more about how media is used, like the connection between… The relationship between media and politics is so…

Also ‘The Thick of It’, I think when I- I watched that when I was like 10 or 11 or something. I think that’s instilled for me, at quite a young age, how a lot of journalists are just kind of mouthpieces for a certain politician who has a connection with them. They want to say something so they’re like, “Please can you write this article?” You call in a favour or whatever, that kind of thing. Obviously, a lot of that is very satirical but it is obviously based on truth. Like that’s what happens. So I think that’s also quite interesting, how I suppose satire about news and politics and their relationship is…

Millions of people watch these shows because it is entertaining but it’s also like, I suppose, universal because everyone engages, to an extent, with politics and everyone engages, to an extent, with the news. Shows like that, I think, have been quite defining on the lens I view news through.

Interviewer: Yes, that’s interesting. Okay. So last question from me, I think. In this kind of environment, we’ve been discussing, of distrusting the media and of people having very opposite political views, etc. what steps do you think news producers can do to maintain their credibility or trustworthiness?

Florence: Yes, I suppose being transparent in the methods that they obtain information about stories they’re turning into news articles. I suppose hiring people that are like a diverse- I think having a diverse workforce, in a news organisation, is really important because you’re not just writing news… You’re writing news which is not targeted but is sensitive towards a range of people as well.

I think the same for every company, you need a diverse workforce in your company otherwise you’re not going to make decisions that reflect the general population. I think that’s really important. I think… I don’t know. It’s tricky because it’s not necessarily their main priority a lot of the time. Yes, I’m not sure. I think they would be the two things that I’d say, probably.

Interviewer: Great. Well that’s my last question I have written down.

Florence: Cool.

Interviewer: So I just want a couple more things while we’ve got a bit of time. Are there any questions that I should’ve asked but didn’t?

Florence: That’s such a good question. Honestly, no, I think that was quite a comprehensive question list, I think. I’ve got nothing more that I’m like, “Oh, I wish I’d had a chance to say this.” I think I’ve said everything that I…

I think, yes, the structure of doing the diary and then having a few weeks to reflect on that was really, really, conducive to thinking more about how I consume media as a personal entity, as like a person. I think that was a really great structure. No, I can’t think of any other questions.

Interviewer: Great. I was going to ask you, which you’ve kind of jumped ahead to, “Did you have any thoughts further, apart from what you’ve just said, on doing the diary and then, latterly, being presented with some data from your diary?”

Florence: Yes, I think this is great. I think, especially because it’s so visual. I think visual communication is… Like I’m dyslexic, for example, and I’m like… If you’d just given me this and it was just pages and pages of writing I’d be like, “There’s no way that I’m going to be able to come up with…” Because you’ve given me an infographic I’m like, “Yes, the afternoon is biggest.” It’s really straightforward and, I think, easy to interpret and then…

I love word clouds, they’re very like… I know they’re very Year Seven but they are very helpful, I think, in understanding, kind of… If you’d given that as a pie chart or something like, “This is how the frequency of…” It’s like a weird way of- But because it is words and you’re presenting me with all the words, just in different sizes, that’s like, “Yes, this is really easy to understand.” I think it’s great and I think it’s a really accessible document really.

Interviewer: Okay. So I think that is, very much, all.

Florence: Cool.

Interviewer: I will press stop on here.

Florence: What are you-?

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