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START AUDIO

Interviewer: I’m also going to put this on as a back up. As I was saying, there are some basic things around what you shared with us on the main pages. The foldout pages are much more… A bit further removed, I would say, from stuff we can know for sure.

[Break in conversation 0:00:36 - 0:01:35]

Do you work at the university?

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: Where are you?

Lynne: I’m across two roles at the moment. One of them is in the executive and governance office, which is just looking into governance, the [ \_\_\_0:01:54] council and things like that. It’s like a graduate role. Then the other one is in educational policy and I work on student voice and hounding students to please fill out a survey so that we can do stuff for them.

Interviewer: Okay, I’m going to give up on that one. This one is recording and it will pick up me a little bit. This booklet is for you to take away and you can look at in your own time. Hopefully, after we’ve done the interview as an extension of the study, once you’ve had a proper look at this, it would be great if you could drop me an email if you have any further thoughts or anything about it.

Lynne: Yes, definitely.

Interviewer: These are inferences about what we think of you as a person based on what you’ve shared. Beneath that are some general things. ‘This user primarily accesses news on their mobile phone indicating a preference for mobile devices.’ Some of them aren’t really that insightful, but some of them are. What I’ll do is I’ll refer to this at times throughout the interview. We’ve got a thing booked for 90 minutes and I’m thinking it will probably only take about an hour, but we’ll see. Nobody likes to be here too long after 5:00. Are you happy for me to start asking the questions?

Lynne: Yes, go for it.

Interviewer: In your book, one of the basic bits of information we’ve got is the times when you access news. In yours I think early morning was the most frequent, but it was pretty evenly spread. Do you think that represents fairly when you do actually access and read news?

Lynne: Yes, I would say so. This a habit I’ve tried to get out recently, but most of the time the first thing I’ll do in the morning is go on my phone, in just scrolling on that will see lots of news related things. I think in the period as I’m getting ready for work that is probably the time I’m seeing a lot of news. Then I guess split with there’s a big chunk that’s noon and that would be when I’m on my lunch I’d then be back on my phone and seeing news things pop up. I’m probably less likely to do it of an evening, so I think that is an accurate representation.

Interviewer: We’ll talk a little bit about exactly what you’re accessing and stuff as we go on, but I’ll just follow my order. In terms of this consumption pattern, have you noticed any patterns or trends in your consumption such as an increase or decrease in terms of the time you spend reading news over time? This represents that two week period. Has that always been that way or have you noticed anything change in all of the years?

Lynne: It’s probably changed quite a lot. Obviously, when I was younger I probably just didn’t engage with it as much because I was less affected by it and less aware of everything that was going on. I think probably post-pandemic I’ve… I think with how much bad news and constant news there was in the pandemic and you had to keep up with it to see what was going on in such an urgent situation. I think post that I’ve probably engaged with the news less because it can be a bit depressing.

I don’t engage with it as much as I used to because of there not being a lot of positive stuff out there. I think that’s probably since being surrounded by it so much and having to keep up with everything. Obviously, you have to keep up with stuff now, but I think that’s when that change maybe happened.

Interviewer: On that note the book also shows some topics, mainly on page seven. Why do you think you tend to…? If this accurate, why do you think you tend to gravitate towards those topics?

Lynne: I think they’re topics that I care about a lot. Particularly I’m thinking mainly of healthcare and politics when I say I care about them a lot. I think I like to be aware of what’s going on politically and I’m quite a politically engaged person. Say if something is suggested when I’m scrolling, I’ll pay attention to it and watch it rather than another topic that I’m less concerned about.

Some things as well, controversial issues and criminal cases are interesting because I feel like even the way they’re worded, that I’m maybe engaging with them because they appear on my social media because they are controversial things that algorithms know people will engage with and things like that.

Then because it’s controversial I watch the whole thing or engage with it more because it’s a topic of much debate. I think it’s partly that I’m interested in the topics that are on the sheet and partly they’re more likely to just appear because on the social media I use they’re more aimed at those kinds of topics, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: I think it makes sense. Let’s just take one so we’re not talking in the abstract. If we take something like the criminal cases. You’re saying you are drawn to stories about criminal cases. You also think the algorithm of, what’s your main thing?

Lynne: Probably TikTok.

Interviewer: You’re saying TikTok shows you those.

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think that’s because they’re globally popular or do you think it’s just worked out you like that?

Lynne: I can’t decide how much credit I give the algorithm of how clever it is in working out what I like. Because they’re things that can evoke very strong emotions in people, like criminal cases, you would want to get to the bottom of something and find out what the whole story is. I imagine the engagement on things like that is more on apps like TikTok than other topics that would cause less strong emotions.

I feel like I’ve lost the train of what I’m saying. I feel like it’s partly the algorithm, but definitely partly that I get drawn into whatever that is and I’m more likely to watch something like that and engage with it because it’s a topic I like. I think I’ve been shown it because the algorithm has worked it out.

Interviewer: We’ll talk about that a bit more once we get warmed up. How often do you encounter news and information online that you suspect is either fake or misleading?

Lynne: That’s an interesting question. I think, relatively, a lot. I’m going to say sometimes. I think that is mostly from people I follow on Instagram sharing things that I may not normally engage with. That’s not to say I definitely engage with everything that’s only 100% truthful.

I think things get shared through social media networks and that’s where I’m most likely to see something that makes me go, “I don’t know if that…” That seems a bit dodgy, a bit fake. I would say I definitely see things that make me go, “I’m not sure about that.” Not all the time. I would say the majority of stuff I feel is mostly reasonable and looks real.

Interviewer: According to your book 23.5% of the time when you read something online you do some kind of research.

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: What prompts you to check the accuracy of something you encounter online? What methods do you use to verify if it’s accurate?

Lynne: What was the first part of that question? Sorry.

Interviewer: What would prompt you? When your friends share stuff on Instagram, what would prompt you to go, “I’m not sure about that.”? What sort of thing? Give me a couple of examples if there’s an answer. On that occasion where you go, “I’m not sure about that,” what do you then do?

Lynne: Okay, got you. I think the first thing that would prompt me is not recognising where it was from. You know, BBC, ITV, the kind of huge news names. Sometimes when I’ve seen it it’s just someone’s own personal Instagram account or something that isn’t particularly related to an organisation. Things like that would make me go someone could have just decided to say this and there’s not necessarily a verification of it. I think where it comes from would make me question it and probably also the topic.

I think things… Off the top of my head I’m thinking of things like vaccines. I think I would be immediately wary of news relating to that full stop because it’s such a controversial topic. There’s a lot of fake news about it and things like that. I think the topic would make be more wary than about… I can’t think of a topic that’s less controversial, but something less debated.

I think how I would do it… I find this increasingly hard as well to verify things. I think I would probably Google it first. I might go to the BBC as my first stop. If they were reporting on something about it or something similar I would be like, okay, maybe this is more of a verified thing. Then I start to trust the BBC less, so I don’t know. They’re probably the first place I would go.

In the past I’ve googled organisations that I haven’t recognised. Sometimes it will explain a bit about what their politics is like or what the organisation is for. That will give me a bit more of a steer of what kind of news it is and whether it’s fully reliable. I think looking at the organisation and seeing if other places are sharing the same information.

I’ve just remembered things like on Twitter, I know during COVID it would highlight that COVID had been mentioned and to be wary of the information that it was putting out. Sometimes now they will have a fact check and say, “Someone has checked this isn’t reliable information.” I’ll use that as well.

Interviewer: I understand that. You use the signals in something like Twitter. You might go to something like the BBC, is that search for a keyword on their home site?

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: I understand those two things. One thing I would like you just to explain a bit more. You say you would Google, part of what you said is you might Google an organisation. If there was a certain company involved in a news story you might Google them if you hadn’t heard of them.

Can you talk a bit more about that googling? Say you see a story. Let’s stay away from the big topics like vaccines, but say you saw a story about… I don’t know. Let’s say you saw a story about an MP doing something disgraceful. There might be something about that where you think, “I’m not quite sure.” What would you Google?

Lynne: That is a good question.

Interviewer: Think of the last time you did that and think what you googled. Don’t use my example if it’s not helpful.

Lynne: I can’t think of the last time I googled it. The one that’s coming to mind, I googled this just to learn more about it, it wasn’t to verify what it was. It was the laws being passed at the moment in Florida, they’re all quite right wing policies. I didn’t really understand what they were, so I was googling that.

I think I would put something very general in. I think I just put in Florida and there were lots of news stories that came up. I think I would put in quite a general term. Maybe if what I was looking for didn’t come up immediately, I would say, “I’m not that bothered.” Then I wouldn’t search for it further.

Interviewer: If you googled a general term, if it doesn’t come up on maybe the first page you think, “There’s nothing else about that, so it’s probably not true.”

Lynne: Yes, probably. I think that would almost answer the question for me, which may not be a reliable method. I think that is what I would do or I would just lose interest in finding out.

Interviewer: Do you think that would apply to my example of the MP as well now that you’ve thought about it? You might put something in Google and see what other things came up.

Lynne: Yes, probably, if I thought there was something off about it. Then as well I’m trying to see because I know particular news outlets have particular biases, even though they’re not supposed to. What different places are saying about it. If I Google it and there are a range of people talking about it in different ways, then I can see it from there. I think I probably would Google if an MP had something and I thought, “That’s a bit strange.” I might just Google their name and then see what came up. If that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yes, it totally makes sense. Along those lines, have you ever intentionally sought out news or information to cross-reference something you’ve read? I guess you’ve kind of answered that. Just to add to that, how often do you think you do that?

Lynne: Probably not that often. Particularly if it’s something… I know I shouldn’t do this really. If it’s something I agree with, I’m much less likely to cross-reference it because that confirms what I already thought about whatever topic. If it’s something I’ve seen in the news quite a lot then I’ll go, okay that’s another one and I don’t cross-reference it. Again, if it’s from an organisation I know I will just take that as it must be true, if I know it quite well.

It doesn’t happen very often. If it does, it will either be that I don’t understand the topic from whatever the first source that I’ve got it from and I want to find out more. Like we were saying, it’s something that seems a bit off or not true and I want to find out more about verifying it. Not very often, I think because I would say most of the news that I see… Like I said before, because most of the news I see to me seems true, that I don’t feel the need to cross-reference it as often.

Interviewer: If you were going to crosscheck information you see in the news, have you ever used…? I know you mentioned you sometimes will Google some general terms. Have you ever used any fact checking services like Factcheck.org or anything like that?

Lynne: Now that you mention it, I definitely have in the past. I can’t quite remember what for. I think it might have been around the time when Boris was resigning and the new Conservative leader was coming in. I think I was quite engaged on Twitter at that time and there were a lot of people saying lots of different things. I do remember a few times I would see a tweet and think, “Meh.” I would go to the fact check page and quite often it would be referenced there. I would take that as what’s on there is true, not whatever was on someone’s tweet.

Interviewer: Is that Factcheck.org?

Lynne: Yes, I think so. I think at that time I definitely used it, but I haven’t used it since.

Interviewer: You said you used that around about the time of the Conservative leadership thing. What do you think it was about that topic that made you think, “I’m going to go to this. I’m not going to use my old look on Google.”? What do you think about that topic that you went to a fact checking site about?

Lynne: I think partly because it was such urgent constantly changing news, to me it was anyway. Again, because I’m very interested in politics. Partly, just the topic was something I was really interested in and wanted to know more. To make sure the information I knew about it and was sharing with others was right.

Also, I think because it seemed so saturated the amount of information that was being put out there on my Twitter. I’d sometimes get to a point where I’d think, “I don’t want to engage with all of this messy, can’t really tell what’s true and everyone has got their own bias that they’re coming in with. I would like something that plainly shows a fact.” I think the saturation of it was what me go, “No, I just want a straightforward bit of information about it.”

Interviewer: From what you’re saying there wasn’t just two sides. There was everyone had an opinion and everyone was different.

Lynne: Yes, definitely. (Laughter)

Interviewer: I remember that time. The graph in here also shows how many times… What you did to respond. Just over half the time you did nothing, which is not a lot actually. About quarter of the time you did research. About a fifth of the time you did some kind of react. What were those reaction things in general? What did you tend to do? Do you tend to comment on things? Do you tend to like?

Lynne: Yes, mostly like. I’m trying to think back now, I think probably nearly all of the instances would have just been liking something. A few of the times it might have been resharing, retweeting something.

Interviewer: We’re mainly talking about Twitter here, Instagram or TikTok.

Lynne: It’s mainly Twitter and TikTok. A like would be the most common one. I don’t tend to comment on anything really.

Interviewer: What sort of stuff might you like? Is it stuff that your friends do because you support or is it certain topics that are newsworthy things? What sort of stuff would you like?

Lynne: I think it would be something positive. I guess there are two sides. It would either be something positive that I’m like, “That bit of news has made me feel really optimistic, really great and I want to like that.” It’s almost a way of sharing it without actually doing it.

On Twitter you can see when someone has liked another post, I will like things knowing that anyone who follows me will see that I’ve liked that. Spreading whatever the message is further or the information. It’s either I really like it or I want other people to see this, but not through a retweet. I’m not really sure where the line is, but one of those two.

Interviewer: I guess retweeting is more of a commitment. Liking, people can see that you like it but it’s somehow less committal.

Lynne: Yes, it’s really strange. I’ve never thought about it until now. I’m not sure where my line is of when it becomes a retweet.

Interviewer: Apart from liking things and doing that kind of liking and sharing, have you ever made a decision or taken an action beyond liking and stuff based on something you’ve read in an online news article?

Lynne: Probably, at some point. This is kind of outside of this two weeks.

Interviewer: Yes, of course.

Lynne: The one that’s immediately come to mind is when the Black Lives Matter stuff really started in the pandemic. A lot of the news I was seeing then I did. I donated to some of the bail funds for the protestors and things like that. That’s the immediate thing that comes to mind where I was like, “This news has made me do things about that.” Since then, I’m not sure if I have.

I guess, maybe, I don’t know if this counts. This probably does count. Sorry, I’m thinking out loud. With the cost of living stuff, then also after the Conservative leadership, then the next one and all that period of the end of last year. A lot of the news I was seeing about that made me sign up to a campaign, the Enough is Enough campaign.

Then I went to one of their, I don’t know what they called it, an evening where they had speakers. I guess I wouldn’t have thought about it at the time, but in a roundabout way that was because of all the news I was seeing about it at the time. Then saw that campaign had launched and engaged with it. I suppose that’s another example.

Interviewer: Yes, absolutely. Just going back to the Black Lives Matter thing. That was something I’m assuming in America on the other side of the world and you’re engaging with it through social media. Was there any sense of checking that was real or authentic?

Lynne: Yes. This is casting my mind back quite a few years now. There was so much again, a mess of information on the internet. I’m trying to remember what fact checking I would have done, if any.

Interviewer: Not necessarily fact checking. What was it about it that would make you think that’s genuine? I just think that’s a really interesting thing that we haven’t come across yet where you’re actually parting with your cash. You wonder what process you did there.

Lynne: I think partly because the sources of information for a lot of it were very well known to me. Obviously, it was national and international news, places like the BBC and things like that were reporting on it. I knew to an extent what was happening was what was happening.

Then thinking about it, probably the vast majority of stuff I saw, particularly of the protests. I remember the police brutality element of the protests people saying, “This isn’t being reported enough on normal news.” It probably was just from random videos from anyone popping up on TikTok or Twitter.

I guess because people were filming it as it happened, I was like that is happening because that’s in front of someone’s eyes. I wouldn’t have questioned it as much. Then I did verify the website I used to send my money to. That wasn’t verifying the news that I’d seen that it was happening, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Whichever the crowdfunding, whatever.

Lynne: Yes, it was a specific website that had clearly done this in the past for other kinds of similar instances. A lot of prominent people were sharing, ‘If you want to help, this is a useful website you can go to that is not just going to steal your money.’ There were quite a lot of people talking about the website that I used that made me think, “This isn’t some random person who’s going to just take a load of money and not doing anything with it.”

Interviewer: It was not necessarily the individual cause, but there was some kind of authenticity around the website, did you say, saying, ‘This website is good. This website is good.’ Was it certain famous people or certain people you knew? I guess that’s where you got your sense of trust from.

Lynne: I think it was partly the Black Lives Matter Instagram and their Twitter. Then there were various activists/influencers. No, influencers is probably not the right word. People engaged on social media who then became very engaged in the Black Lives Matter movement. Not quite activists, but became a part of it. People that I felt… I was going to say people that I felt I knew, but I don’t know them at all. People that I was aware of and seemed trustworthy to me.

Interviewer: Who you with familiar online that didn’t just pop up, you knew them before.

Lynne: Yes, exactly. Them and the more official channels of this is the Black Lives Matter campaign official website. I can’t remember the names of the other ones. I think The Bail Project or something like that. Things that had clearly been existing organisations/campaigns for a while and people that I recognised.

Interviewer: Then because they had shared this is the place to donate money that was enough.

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: You googled that as well, maybe the actual name of the website.

Lynne: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: Other people that you were familiar with online and you kind of thought, “That’s where I’ll… I’ll believe them.”

Lynne: Yes, yes, yes. I think that’s what it was.

Interviewer: These aren’t things that we necessarily think of. The whole thing of doing the diary was not to make you really think about that all the time, but at least to put those thoughts around.

Lynne: It’s really interesting.

Interviewer: Do you often share? I know you didn’t report doing that much here. Do you often share stuff you read online either in private message groups, to individuals, on social media, anywhere?

Lynne: Largely, no. I don’t think so. I did notice as I was doing this I would then end up having a conversation about it, either with family or friends, about something I’d seen in person or on the phone, not directly through sharing it with them. I would end up being like, “Did you see X, Y and Z?” I don’t tend to do that through social media, texts or things like that very often at all.

Interviewer: You do tend to discuss news you’ve read with friends or family.

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: How does that kind of thing typically play out? What sorts of things would you tend to discuss? Would it just be everything you’ve read? Part of the conversation every night, “Today I read all these things.” How do those conversations come about? What sorts of topics?

Lynne: I think family-wise because that’s probably where it happens most. I live quite far away from my parents so I’ll ring them once a week or something like that. We’ll nearly always end up talking something political, which is obviously never the intention when we call. We’re quite a politically engaged family and they’re probably where I get my political engagement from. We’ll always end up talking about something in the news that’s come up. Usually something that we’re like, “Can you believe this terrible thing that’s happened?” Rather than something positive that we’ve seen.

I remember the last time I called my dad we ended up in a big conversation about that they’ve introduced photo ID and my nan was going to struggle to vote. The news we’d seen around that. Quite often my parents will ask me my opinion on the more controversial issues.

Not too long ago they were rewording Roald Dahl books and the whole woke thing. Both times I called my parents not long after that each of them said, “Did you hear about Roald Dahl and what they were doing about that? What do you think?” We ended up having a conversation about that. It’s usually political or quite controversial topics that will get brought up.

Interviewer: From what you said about the political stuff initially, is this conversations where before you even start you know you’re going to be on the same…?

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: You agree.

Lynne: Very much, yes. The controversial things we don’t always, but political we know we’re both going to have kind of... One of those conversations where you’re both riling each other up more about how angry you are about whatever is happening. We definitely know we’re...

Interviewer: Reaffirming topics. Reminding each other, “We both agree. Down with this stuff.”

Lynne: Definitely.

Interviewer: The Roald Dahl rewording sounded interesting. That was your parents saying to you, “What do you think of that?” Is that them trying to get a lead from you on how they should feel? Are they using you as a sounding board or are they just saying, “What does this all mean?”

Lynne: That’s interesting. I think sometimes they do. I think they see because I’m much more engaged on social media than they are that I’ll get a breadth of opinions and information much quicker than they do, possibly. That’s maybe their thoughts behind it.

When they ask about controversial things… I think half the time they’re seeking that reaffirming that, “We’re on the same page about this controversial issue, aren’t we?” On the times that we’re not they then do seem to maybe, if we disagree they’ll pull back slightly on their opinion and go, now that I’ve said I disagree maybe they rethink a little bit their stance. If that makes sense.

Interviewer: Do you think perhaps there are some topics where you’re both really sure?

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: That could be, “Look at the terrible state of the government.” Whereas other things they’re not off the table to talk about, but they might start a bit more tentatively.

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: That seems to happen that one way. Would that happen the other way? Is there anything you might tentatively talk to them because you’re not quite sure how they’ll respond? Would you only ever talk about stuff where you kind of know how they’ll respond? I don’t mean in general, I mean in terms of what you read online.

Lynne: I think it’s probably kind of the same but the other way around. Most of the time I will assume we’ll be on the same page about any news that I’ve seen, and we usually are. On things where we’re not, I think I go into the conversation expecting them to be… On the other side they’ve probably brought the controversial topic half expecting me to agree as well. I think I do the same. Then when we don’t, we’re both like, “Oh, well.” Talk about it more and we’re not. I’m maybe more fixed in what I’ve come into the conversation, what side I’ve come down on, than they are.

Interviewer: That makes sense. It’s very interesting. On that note, have you ever, based on something you’ve read online, news, information online, changed your mind about a topic, an issue or a person?

Lynne: That’s really interesting. The first one that comes into my head is the Johnny Depp and Amber Rose trial. That was everywhere. I couldn’t open any social media without everyone’s opinions on either side of that. My opinion definitely shifted across the time when that was big news. That’s probably the most recent and biggest change that comes to mind. There was a very clear you were on one side or the other in most people’s minds. I switched. That was because of all of the… I think it was because of the news I was seeing online.

I started off Johnny Depp’s side and all of the news I saw was she’s crazy. Then it switched, but I don’t know when the news I was seeing changed or why the information I was seeing online differed. Then it became people saying, “How is everyone not seeing how awfully she’s been treated?” It shifted over to that side and it stayed on that side. That is interesting because I’ve never thought about what prompted that, it’s just kind of what I was engaging with and seeing changed. If that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yes. Do you think as you were exposed to a different argument, at first you read stuff that affirmed your argument, Johnny Depp is nice? Do you think there was just a change in what you were exposed to or do you think that was something you stumbled across or sought out? Do you think the general opinion in the world shifted all at the same time and you just kind of shifted with it?

Lynne: I think…

Interviewer: When you decided, “I’m on team Amber now.” Were you still seeing team Johnny things, but you just thought, “I don’t believe that anymore,” or did that stuff completely shift? The way you spoke about it is as if the whole world shifted.

Lynne: I think I still saw some of it, but not to the same… There wasn’t as much of it. I think that might be because as I engaged with it less… It wouldn’t have been from people that I followed, it was just the kind of general information that was out there on suggested posts and things like that. I think as I engaged with it less, I got shown it less because the algorithms are like, she’s not interested in this video. I think people’s opinions started to shift slightly as well, but it probably was because I engaged with it less. Now I’m thinking, “Why did I engage? What shifted that?” I don’t know. (Laughter)

Interviewer: [ \_\_\_0:41:08]. We’ll move on then. In here, it indicates some of the most frequent sources of news you shared during the study. I think you’ve touched on this a bit, do you tend to rely on certain news sources more than others and have you noticed any change in this over time?

Lynne: I think it’s probably stayed quite consistent. The BBC has always been the main one and the main port of call, if I wanted to find out about something that was going on it would be that. I think obviously as TikTok has grown in popularity, obviously it didn’t exist not to long ago, that has probably become my main source for a lot of information and a lot of news. It wouldn’t have been in the past, that maybe would have been more Twitter or watching the actual news, I don’t do that anymore. I think with the introduction of TikTok, that’s taken quite a lot of… I would use that more now than obviously before it existed.

Interviewer: The BBC will have a TikTok now. You’re still sometimes accessing the same source, but just through TikTok rather than Twitter or direct.

Lynne: Yes, that’s true. I didn’t think of it like that, but you’re right. A lot of the news that I see on TikTok is from the TikTok accounts of news agencies that I would have watched on TV or would have seen on Twitter.

Interviewer: Those sources are still kind of the ones you rely on.

Lynne: Yes, through a different method. Yes, definitely. I get Channel 4, ITV and they haven’t appeared on there, but they would be places I would get my news from. Again, I see their TikToks rather than the website.

Interviewer: I seem to remember yours. I think the way we extracted these was really simple for most people. If it’s just a ‘www.’ we can just do that automatically [ \_\_\_0:43:42] and you can kind of do it. Then some people have the odd few social media ones where you could just manually do it. I think you had loads.

Lynne: Made it really hard. (Laughter)

Interviewer: I think your numbers there probably more represent… It’s probably incomplete, a little bit incomplete. The TikTok numbers will be… I do remember your tables actually. I got distracted there. You are using TikTok a lot more, that’s been a shift, but you’re still accessing these same sources of media a lot.

Lynne: Yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer: Not just going to people, you’re still going to the big agencies.

Lynne: Yes, yes, yes. I’d say so.

Interviewer: How do you feel about the role of social media in this dissemination of news and information? Has this affected your trust in sources? We’ve kind of just reflected on that, but I guess I’ll just ask it clearly.

Lynne: It’s funny to say because it’s where I get all of my news from, but I don’t feel good about the role social media plays in news. I think as I’ve grown up with social media being more and more used for everything, I think it makes the news quite polarised. It’s quite pessimistic, you see most of the bad things. Inciting hate and wanting people to engage in things, so making them as clickbait-y and controversial as possible. I don’t like that’s where social media has brought news to, but that is still the place I go to for news.

Trust in it, I do try and be aware even when I’m engaging with TikTok and Twitter for news that I’m seeing it on TikTok and Twitter and this is all through social media. Just to be aware social media is maybe not, well it isn’t, as trustworthy as watching something on the news or reading it in a newspaper and things like that. That’s in my head, which it wouldn’t have been.

Interviewer: This might be just what we’ve already talked about or it might be slightly different. If you’re accessing news through TikTok, how do you determine if something is trustworthy?

Lynne: I think it’s the source that it comes from is definitely a big thing.

Interviewer: Is that…? This is the BBC TikTok account?

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: Could it also be extended to, “I’m a BBC journalist.” “This is a video that’s got the BBC logo and I’m sharing it.”?

Lynne: I think it has to have to the stamp of the BBC’s official account, the verified sticker. What I look out for is that it’s been posted by an official account, usually a large news agency, rather it being someone saying, “The BBC said…” That being in their video. I think it would be the agency posting it that would make me trust it.

Interviewer: Okay, great. Have you ever stopped following a certain news source because you no longer trusted it?

Lynne: Interesting. Not off the top of my head, I don’t think so. The only thing that’s come to mind is when… I can’t quite remember the whole story now so it might be useless. They found the BBC chairman had donated loads of money to the Conservative Party or something like that. I didn’t use the BBC for a little bit because I was just was angry and also thought I trusted them less.

I do remember trying not to look at it for a bit and thinking still I felt the most trust for it out of everything else. Anywhere else I would have gone I would think, “Where else? I need to know what’s happening in the world, where else do I go and where else do I trust?” It would still be them because they’re such a… I don’t know. They’ve been a national institution for so long that I would still trust in them. I did for a little bit and then caved and went back to them anyway.

Interviewer: Has your trust in using information sources been affected by any recent things? The rise in fake news, disinformation campaigns, but also I want to start thinking about now things like deepfakes and AI generated content.

Lynne: I think that really worries me at the moment. When I was saying it before it made me think of that. When I was talking about that I verified a Black Lives Matter stuff because I was seeing someone taking a video of it and it happening in real time. As I was saying that I thought it’s getting more and more that someone could have, some kind of AI or something could have made a video to make it look like that was happening and it’s not. Putting someone in a video who wouldn’t have actually been there. All things like that. I think I’m definitely more wary of that at the moment. Sorry, what was the question?

Interviewer: Has your trust in online information been affected by these things?

Lynne: Yes, definitely.

Interviewer: You said that’s made you a bit more wary about a particular video.

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: How do you think the development of these new technologies, the deepfakes, AI generated content, will affect the way people are able to verify news in the future going forward?

Lynne: I think it will make it a lot worse and a lot harder. I haven’t seen a lot of bad examples of it, but I’ve seen examples of someone has taken a song and got an AI to do it as if a different artist had sung the song. That’s just a fun thing to do, but people are saying this is really scary for the implications it has beyond that. Making it sound like the Prime Minister has said something that he hasn’t said.

I’m not very well versed in AI and what it all means. I am worried there aren’t easy ways to work out if that is real or not, especially for someone who’s scrolling on social media and sees something. I don’t know how you would be able to tell whether that is a recording of someone’s voice or whether that is an AI altered recording.

Interviewer: That’s what I was going to follow up with. Do you think right now you’re able to tell an authentic video, audio or image from a fake one? Do you feel equipped to do that right now as the technology stands?

Lynne: No, I don’t think so. Some things where you can see it’s still making little mistakes or it’s not quite as perfect as it would look in real life, I think I can just about look at something and think, “That picture looks like it’s been altered with AI,” maybe, but I wouldn’t say that for sure. Beyond that I would have no idea in terms of videos, recordings and putting people’s faces onto different people. I wouldn’t know how to begin looking at whether that was real or not.

This isn’t news, but I saw that someone had put a version of a Beyonce song out and said, “Oh my God, they’ve added this rapper onto the song.” Everyone in the comments was like, ‘No, it’s AI. It’s AI.’ I believed it. Again, that’s just a song. I would have not been able to tell the difference and wouldn’t know how to look into finding the difference.

Interviewer: I understand what you’re saying. I wonder if it’s different. It’s not implausible for someone to add a rap to a Beyonce song, so contextually that kind of makes sense. If we’re thinking about political use, you were talking about someone faking the Prime Minster’s statement or whatever, do you think you would be able to recognise something like that? What might be the queries for that?

Lynne: To an extent. I feel like if it was really outrageous, I don’t know, if he was speaking Klingon or something, I’d be like, that doesn’t seem like something that would happen and this probably isn’t true. Especially because I know more that AI is becoming used, if it was something that made me think, “That’s a really weird thing to say.” That would come into my head, “Someone just altered this themselves.” It would be the kind of outrageousness of what they were saying or what was being shared that would make me question it.

I think whether I would think that seems in character for that person. I’m conscious of it working the other way, if it was something that affirmed that I don’t like the government, that in my head is in character of them to do, then I would believe it more than if it was something on the other side of what I believe. If that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yes, it does.

Lynne: I think it would be really hard. I don’t feel fully equipped to do that. Maybe the context of what they were saying would be initial or what was being shared I’d decide whether it seemed real or not.

Interviewer: Personally, I think another side of this is going to be people saying things for real and them saying, “That wasn’t me.”

Lynne: Yes, I didn’t think of that. That’s a whole other thing you’ve got to worry about.

Interviewer: There’s a last little set of questions now more on what you touched on about the producers of news, state broadcasters and stuff like that. First of all, how comfortable are you with the use of algorithms to personalise the news you see?

Lynne: I don’t like them as a concept. Then when I’m on social media I do like that what I’m seeing is things I’m interested in which obviously the algorithm has picked up. I feel like I’m relatively well versed in how the algorithms work, what they do and what they show you. It’s not like a foreign idea.

I feel relatively comfortable with them as a concept and my knowledge of them, but not comfortable with them being a thing that is on my social media. I get conscious it just creates an echo chamber and I’m much more likely to see things I already agree with and not necessarily news that would make me question the beliefs I’ve already got. If that makes sense.

Interviewer: We’ve touched on that belief system stuff. Does it concern you in terms of your personal data? Do you ever have concerns about how websites might use your personal data, like TikTok, Twitter or whatever?

Lynne: Yes, I worry about that. The worry comes from learning about… I can’t remember who it was. With Brexit and when Trump got elected, how people’s data was used within that to target, this is a person who is unlikely to definitely vote either way, we can target them and try and get them to vote one way or the other. Learning about that made me very conscious of how my data is perceived to be by people who could buy it or use. What they would then try and target with me seeing and things like that.

Interviewer: Do you ever do anything to address those concerns? On a similar note, are you the sort of person when you get cookie pop ups go and change everything?

Lynne: Yes. (Laughter) I do. That’s interesting as well. If I’m going to shop on a website I’ll just accept all the cookies and I’m not bothered. If it’s a website I think, “You could be a website that would use my data in a questionable way.” If it’s news or if it’s…. I can’t think of something else. If it was a news website, Google in particular I’ll go through and take off everything that isn’t essential for the running of the system. Thinking about it, there are some that will still take my data and could do stuff with it. If it’s just a shopping website, I just press accept.

Interviewer: Because shopping websites…

Lynne: I don’t know. Partly because in my head it’s less of a risk. They’re still taking my information; they’ll see that I’m clicking on dresses and it will be used. I guess because I’m less worried about seeing adverts for clothes than I am about seeing news that’s targeted at a specific angle.

Interviewer: Do you think they’re separate?

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: You’re happy to give your data to the online retailer because they’ll just try and sell you clothes and might choose things you like, it will be convenient. Other things, not so.

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: Are there any other steps, apart from clicking cookies, you take to protect your personal data from these sites you’re more suspicious of?

Lynne: Not that I’m aware of. I think it’s something that I don’t know a lot about, so I may have inadvertently. I’ll turn off as many things as I can, if that makes sense. I know Apple says, ‘Do you want us to send your analytics back to Apple?’ I say no. I don’t know how that… What effect that has. I just turn it off because I don’t like how it sounds. I don’t know what the next steps are, so I don’t really know what it has to do with data and how it uses my data. I don’t know if it protects me any more than I already am when I’m just turning off things.

I have my privacy settings on as high as I can have them, but I’m not aware… That just makes me feel better. I don’t necessarily know that’s something that stops anyone using my data more than if they weren’t off. I just don’t know enough about the other things that are out there other than saying I don’t accept cookies.

Interviewer: Linking to what you said around this political message targeting, do you think perhaps some of the stuff you see is that?

Lynne: Erm...

Interviewer: Do you think you can protect yourself enough? There’s that question, which might be really difficult. Another thing is, do you ever do anything actively? Other people have talked about doing things to, not trick, but to push the algorithm in a certain way. Not in a big, even just on a shopping website people might… There’s no real benefit in liking, liking, liking. Some people will do that because it wants the algorithm to give it better recommendations.

Lynne: No, I don’t think I’ve ever done that. Not with news. I think maybe on my TikTok I would be more likely to like. I’m really into dance, so I’d like dance videos because I know if I tell… If I’m engaging with those posts and liking them, then the algorithm is more likely to show me them again in the future.

Interviewer: There’s a conscious there, “I like this video so I get more of these videos.”

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: That’s a conscious level thing you’re doing.

Lynne: Yes, yes, yes. Not all the time, it might just be that I like the video. I’ve definitely done that before of thinking, “I’d like to see more of this thing, so I’m going to press like and expect the algorithm will then show me more of this thing.” I’ve never tested it.

I know my family will do that quite a lot, not quite a lot. Sometimes they’ll deliberately try and prove that the phone is listening to them while they’ve talked about some kind of shopping or something. I’ve never tried to test it in that way. I’m conscious if I like this I’ll see more of this and I want to.

Interviewer: Going more generally back to this idea of personalised newsfeeds. You talked a little bit about how that creates these… I can’t think how you referred to it. You said you only see things that confirm your view. So you can talk about that as well. What do you think, including that, are the main impacts of personalised news feeds on the information people are exposed to? Expanding on that idea.

Lynne: Yes, that’s the first one that comes to mind is you end up seeing only things that you agree with, which isn’t necessarily terrible, but it becomes it when you’re then not open to any other kinds of information, ways of thinking or to being proved wrong because you’ve seen so much of one idea that must be true.

I think is happening more often where people are less open to being proved wrong or less open to changing their opinions on things because all they’ve seen for however long is this one idea that they’ve accepted. I think that can get quite dangerous. Can you ask the question again?

Interviewer: You’ve answered it.

Lynne: Okay, great.

Interviewer: I just want to pick up on, you said that can get dangerous, in what way?

Lynne: I think because I feel as though the algorithms are targeted sometimes to showing you political stuff, showing you stuff it knows will evoke an emotional reaction, angry and things like that. I think because it tends to be about the controversial big dividing topics that can be really… That have big impacts.

I guess I’m thinking in the pandemic the vaccines, people not following the rules and things like that. Also, thinking about upcoming elections and big decisions where the country is asked to vote on something. I think because they can be such huge topics that have such vast effects that it’s dangerous to have one idea, not see anything that would suggest otherwise and then close yourself off to anything that would be different to what you’ve accepted.

Interviewer: Let’s go on to the institutions. You’ve talked a lot about the BBC already. Not just the BBC, you talked about big news source producers. Do you trust the BBC more than privately owned advertising revenue sources of news or is there not a line there for you?

Lynne: That’s really interesting. I’m not sure. The BBC still in my head is probably the source I trust the most, but maybe since the stuff with the chairman slightly less. I’m maybe leaning more towards something like Channel 4. It’s interesting I’ve never thought of the, I don’t know, the difference between places that are publicly or privately owned and how that might affect the news they’re putting out there. I think I do trust the BBC probably over most other news agencies still.

Interviewer: Not necessarily because they’re state funded. They’re not state funded, but…

Lynne: No, because I’ve never really made that distinction in terms of how much I trust them, which is interesting because it makes me think about the private ones. Just because I see it as the main news institution in the country that I trust it more. Not necessarily because they’re not privately funded.

Interviewer: Now that we’re talking about the state funded thing, do you think the state broadcaster or state broadcasters in general...? We’re here now, so we’re talking about the BBC. Do you think they should have different standards or different regulations than privately funded?

Lynne: That’s interesting. I’m saying no because I think they should all have the same kind of standard. I think they should all be held to a very high standard. I guess because the BBC is run in the way it is that they can… That maybe it’s easier to give them a higher standard than to try and give legally in terms of… I don’t know what they would be, television rules.

That you can do that easier for something like the BBC than a privately owned news agency, which I’m not sure on. I think they should all be held to the same high standard, but it’s easier to give the BBC a higher standard, then I understand why they would be held to a higher standard.

Interviewer: We should expect more from the BBC.

Lynne: Yes.

Interviewer: We should expect them to hold higher standards.

Lynne: Yes, I think so. Especially, I’m thinking tax payer money and things like that goes to the BBC. I’m seeing them as the main trustworthy institution, news agency, in the country, so then they should be at that standard and be using tax payers’ money to meet a very high expectation.

Interviewer: Based on that I’ve got a question you might think it might be difficult to answer, but we’ll give it a go. In this context of, including yourself, losing trust in people like the BBC. Not people, institutions like the BBC. This heightened polarisation of political views. What do you think news broadcasters like the BBC can do to maintain or even increase levels of credibility and trustworthiness? In this new world, what can people like the BBC do?

Lynne: The first thing I think of is acknowledging what’s happening. I think sometimes I feel like when I’m watching news they’re ignoring how polarised everything is, how much people are seen on social media and how messy it gets. I think being seen to be open and honest about the mess of information that people are seeing but that whatever news agency is supposed to be cutting through all of that and not engaging in the fake news and all things like that and, “You can trust us to be truthful.”

I think acknowledging that we are in this new situation, talking about it and having open conversations about it. I know a lot of them will do this anyway, but I think continuing to try and have a range of views. When they ask people to come on and speak about things, that they’ve got people from various backgrounds and with various opinions on topics. Also, being clear about what the facts are.

As I’m saying that I’m thinking, talking about vaccines, if you had people to talk about vaccines and had to get people from every kind of viewpoint on it, they’d have to be clear if someone was saying something that factually is incorrect. It gets kind of murky. I do really like the fact checking system. I also know that some people will just believe that and that’s not enough for them. I think that’s a symptom of the polarisation and the way social media is affecting news.

I think having a breadth of people there. Having a way to show this is factual and using facts as much as possible. Then acknowledging and talking about what’s happening and maybe opening people’s eyes if they’re not aware of how saturated in one opinion or how fake news can take over your social media feed and things like that.

Interviewer: How important do you think it is for these news providers to be transparent about their sources and their methods of gathering information?

Lynne: That’s really interesting. I think that could be a really useful way for news agencies to gain more trust from the public. I obviously go to the BBC as my main source. Until you said that I’ve never really questioned. The BBC has obviously got their information from somewhere, as do all the news agencies. I guess at the end of articles they would link various sources or say where they’ve got it from. I think making that clearer because that’s not something I’m hugely aware of would help.

I think that is important that you see, yes you’ve got the name of the news agency is one that you trust and you know very well, but to know where they got their information from. A lot of the TikToks I saw from the BBC it would start with a quote and it would have source, ONS or someone like that. I think that’s good, but may be easy to miss and not widely known.

Interviewer: I think that is the end of my questions. Thank you. Is there anything else in your book you thought was a bit surprising or strange or false? Is there any fake news?

Lynne: (Laughter) I don’t think so. It’s really interesting. I want to change that my habit is on my phone in bed. To see that written down, I’d like to not do that anymore. It’s interesting to see it.

Interviewer: It suggests you value staying informed during your personal time.

Lynne: That’s good. I’ll take it as a positive then. (Laughter) I guess the other one that I’m curious about is the aviation regulations, that was the one that made me… Sorry, it’s on the other side. I wondered where that had come from.

Interviewer: I tell you what, if you get any other questions about your book you can send me an email and ask. I’ll probably be able to work out why it said that, I might have some examples. As I said, the whole point of this was to be a little bit, it’s from an incomplete dataset. If you do have any questions, comments on anything about this booklet or about the whole process, please just get in touch by email. This is going to be a really big, long term project. Even if you get in touch about stuff like this, all of it’s interesting as we go on. I’m going to turn this off.

END AUDIO

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