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Duration: 1:11:05  
Date: 01/06/2023  
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START AUDIO

Interviewer: That's on now, and I'm going to turn this on as my backup. Excuse me. One, two, three. Could you just speak?

Aliza: Yeah, sure. Did that work?

Interviewer: Yeah. I mean, this won't pick anything up very well. These microphones are, kind of, you have to get really close to them and they sound really good, but I don't expect you to be-

Aliza: You don't need me to be super, super close?

Interviewer: No, I mean, we could, and then we'd have this really wonderful quality audio that we couldn't do anything with anyway, so it's just a backup.

Aliza: Cool.

Interviewer: Great. So, the first thing in your book I want to draw your attention to is the times of the day.

Aliza: Yes.

Interviewer: So, are you recording? Yes. Right. Yes. So, first of all, does this accurately, you think, reflect the times of day that you actually consume news rather than share them with us? And yes, could you just talk a little bit about what's happening on that typical pattern of when you consume news throughout the day?

Aliza: Yeah, well, morning definitely makes sense because if, for example, I'm going to work and sat on the bus or travelling and I'm, like, on a train. I guess it's mostly during travel, which would largely happen in the mornings that usually I would be on my phone either actively checking the news or scrolling through Instagram, and I do follow quite a few news outlets on Instagram.

Doing this study did make me realise that sometimes I have a lull during the workday in the afternoon, at, like, 2:00 or 3:00pm, when I'm thinking about what I'm going to do next, and while I'm deciding what to do next, I'll sometimes check the news and give myself a 10- or 15-minute brain break, look at the news and then decide what I'm doing next. So that was quite fun to notice about myself as well, starting to notice my own habits when doing this.

Interviewer: Yeah, so a very few early morning, and then the evening, is that again the commute?

Aliza: Yeah. So it would either be the commute or doing what many people are doing, just sitting and scrolling in the evenings.

Interviewer: At home?

Aliza: Yes, at home. But, yeah, it would make sense that it was also the commute coming back from work.

Interviewer: So I guess all three of those main times, the commute, the evening and the afternoon, you're essentially on your own?

Aliza: Yeah, for the most part. I did travel during part of the study when I was with my mum, so she was with me. And there was occasionally, sometimes when I would be reading something and would immediately mention it to her because she was right there. But yeah, during the study, it was hard to tell if I would then later, as in a few days or weeks later, decide to mention what I'd read to someone because I don't often mention things to people immediately, but it might come up that I'm talking to someone and it's, like, “Oh, I did actually read about this a week or so ago.”

But that's hard to predict in the context of actually filling out the daily diaries, whether or not I would actually end up mentioning it, something like that I'd read to people later.

Interviewer: We didn't expect any part of the diary to be really accurate or anything. It was more what you mentioned, we hoped just to make people, I guess, raise a little bit higher in their consciousness what they're doing, so this discussion could be more informed, really.

Aliza: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So you've kind of talked about a trend or a pattern during the day, especially during this two-week period or perhaps now. So have you noticed any changes in your patterns of consumption over time, either reading more, reading less, or the times when you read, have there been any changes over time in that pattern?

Aliza: Not particularly. Those are when I tend to look at things. I will follow the news more if there's something in particular that I want more updates on. So, for example, during the study, there was a lot coming out on The Guardian about the Royal Family's finances. So, I kept checking, like, “Oh, is there more about this? Has other stuff been found out about this?” Or, for example, being an American, and I keep up on American news because I'm still a voter, that if there is a hot topic that I want to keep informed of, like reproductive rights and stuff, I will check the news more regularly for updates on that as well.

Interviewer: You touched on it a bit, but what draws you to certain topics or issues in terms of consuming online news? What do you think it is that drew you to these issues over that time?

Aliza: Well, I did notice that I still read a lot of American news, not necessarily American news outlets, although the NPR quite a bit. But especially around election time. During this time, what else was going on? There was quite a bit about anti-trans legislation during that time in the US that I wanted to find out more about. And again, the reproductive rights issues in the US, that was something that I wanted to follow quite closely because next year is an election year. They just keep coming back around. (Laughter)

Yeah, so being up to speed on where things are at. Again, because I'm still an active voter, so I want to know what it is that's going on. Yeah, I was interested in reading about the situation regarding the monarchy at the time because of the ramping up to the Coronation, and there having been a lot of discussion after the Queen's death about whether or not the monarchy would continue, and there being a lot of evidence coming out about exemptions from laws and grey areas around finances.

And I was interested in seeing whether there was actually going to be anything that came out of any of these things like that were coming to light. So yeah, that's definitely part of it. So current events is something like that I tend to keep up on. I also studied international relations in university, so I tend to… like, with things kicking off in Sudan during that time, I'm just definitely interested in trying to pick up what was going on in Sudan.

I noticed I wasn't reading as much about Ukraine as I was expecting. But it had been a year, and I think that's probably indicative of people wanting to keep up on it, but also, now that it's not a new situation, yeah, hopefully not interest in it waning, but you kind of assume that that would happen to some extent. So, yeah, I tend to be an international and current events person. So that tends to dictate what I look at as well.

Interviewer: Well, yeah, I mean, you know, we infer that you had a global perspective, so that sounds about right. And that's to do with I guess you mentioned, you know, you've got skin in the game, as it were, in American politics, but also your interest in international relations from your studies.

Aliza: Yeah.

Interviewer: Good. So I guess you kind of touched on it, but do you think there is something in particular that makes certain topics appeal to you rather than… not rather than because that's a fair enough reason, but just things like that are really topical at the time, I guess. Is there anything you think you could reflect on in terms of why you're drawn to those topics, or is it just that that’s what’s there to consume?

Aliza: Well, it's definitely personal interests. But I've also noticed more recently, in the past year, I changed job roles and the primary focus of my job role is improving the international student experience. So I have noticed that I've not only been paying a lot more attention to, for example, news coming from the UK Government about legislation but also developing situations in the world, for example, Newcastle being a University of Sanctuary and that being something like that has been brought to my attention in my new job role.

So, obviously, the situation in Ukraine is something that I've been keeping up on. But then the developing situation in Sudan, I think the number of students coming who are, for example, refugees or asylum seekers is probably just going to continue to grow, unfortunately. And so, that was something like that was in the back of my mind, looking at the news about Sudan, was thinking, “Oh, I wonder if this is going to be something like that we'll start seeing in terms of students coming to Newcastle as a University of Sanctuary.”

So that is definitely part of it. Not only do I have, I guess, my natural international hat on from my own interest and my studies, but also keeping an eye on things like that could actually impact my actual work and wanting to be on top of things going on so that it doesn't suddenly come to my attention that there is a developing situation, but that I'm actually horizon scanning in that sense.

Interviewer: Okay. How often do you encounter online news or information that you suspect is fake or misleading?

Aliza: All the time. Because whenever I open up a search engine or something on my work laptop, I'll see loads of headlines, and it's always having to think critically of what the headline is and where it's coming from. And, you know, the whole clickbait thing as well, is the headline even true in relation to what the information that's in the article is? Because they're just wanting to get traffic. But it's something like that I've been really mindful of, not just in the last few years with the whole fake news thing.

But, like, I remember growing up in quite a, I would say, liberal as in progressive family in the US and thinking, “Oh, I don't understand how anyone can believe Fox News. This is just a totally strange concept to me.” And then going to the local gym and one of the news stations being on was Fox News just all the time. And even though I would look at it and be, like, “This is ridiculous,” I remember a couple of weeks after going into the gym being like, “Oh, I remember seeing something about that,” and being like, “I saw that on Fox News.”

So it's just being very aware of the fact that if something is always in your face all the time, it's very, very hard to totally ignore it. It will get into your head. (Laughter) So that's something like that I try to… I think since that experience, that's something like that I've always been trying to be mindful of is, like, “Where is this information coming from in this news article? Is it from a source that I have a lot of trust in?” and not just me personally, but globally? Is this considered a well-reputed news source?

And what a news outlet’s political leanings may or may not be. And trying to, like, take that all into account. But yeah, there's definitely loads of stuff out there that I've seen basically every day, it’s, like, either that is not a thing totally, or, like, if this was a thing, it would be reported much, much more widely instead of just in the Daily Express. So, yeah.

Interviewer: So a lot of things you mentioned there. Basically, the whole questions I have, so that’s great. We’ll have to get to them one at a time.

Aliza: That’s okay.

Interviewer: So just to go back to the day-by-day. So what might prompt you to check the accuracy of something you’ve read online? And what methods would you use then to do that verification?

Aliza: Okay. A headline that seemed like it was… not, like, incongruous with… Is that even the right word? Incongruous with what the rest of the news outlets would be reporting. So, for example, if I saw a headline, and I was like, “Oh, really?” I would maybe look at the BBC or The Guardian or CNN or something and be, like, “Has anyone else said anything about this?” and if it's nowhere to be found, it's like, “Okay, this seems weird that if this is breaking news that it clearly hasn't broken anywhere else.”

And then if I was not sure, I like to run things by people who I know, who I know are also quite well informed. So, for example, if I saw a really troubling news story from the US, I would be most likely to contact my friends or my parents in the US and say, “I have just seen this. Is this a real thing?”

Interviewer: So you would contact people? You'd contact people actively rather than maybe whatever. Are you talking about checking people's social media account or are you talking about actually calling somebody?

Aliza: No, I would send a link to them and be, like, “I just saw this, and is this true or have you heard of this?” But I guess that's also because I trust the people who I'm close with to be fairly well informed and to also read up on the news and to also read up on the news in ways that are probably quite similar to the ways that I read up on the news. Or if it was the same for UK news, if it was in relation to my work, I might mention it to my team at work saying, “Oh, I've just seen that this is maybe a thing. Is anyone else getting… Did anyone else know that this was a thing?”

Or, “Has this come out in any of the networks that we're a part of?” Yeah, so trying to think creatively about how I could potentially vet that information, to some extent.

Interviewer: So along those lines, have you ever intentionally sought out news or information to cross-reference something you've read? You’ve kind of covered that. And if so, well, I guess, how often do you find yourself doing that? I guess what I'm thinking is you don't necessarily do that for everything you see, so you see a whole lot of fake things.

Aliza: Yes.

Interviewer: You won’t necessarily go and actively cross-check some of them. You maybe just make a decision immediately. But yeah, so-

Aliza: Like, breaking news for sure, would definitely see, but partially to see if everyone was reporting the same information or if anyone had new information. Or, like, for example, with the situation, the January 6th incident, I don't know what other word to use for that. With the US Capitol. Checking different news sources that I would also trust but may not necessarily be as politically aligned with me. So, for example, the Washington Post tends to be more centrist and used to be a bit more right-leaning.

So, sometimes I would say, “Right. Well, NPR is saying this. The New York Times is saying this. What does The Washington Post say?” Because if they say exactly the same thing, then that is quite a major vote of support. And if they say something slightly different, it would make me not necessarily question it, but be a bit more open to the idea that not everything that is said in that article is necessarily exactly as it happened, or that they're just wanting to have a bit more of a range and get as an unbiased kind of view of it as possible.

Interviewer: Interestingly, you know, you said one way you do that is, kind of, I guess, a left-to-right political spectrum to a certain extent, especially on stories that you could think of as political stories.

Aliza: Mmhmm.

Interviewer: Is there any other ways you might do that rather than along this political spectrum?

Aliza: Not off the top of my head. I think it's really when it comes to politics, political situations, that that's when I notice that I do it.

Interviewer: Are political stories like that more likely the time when you would do that cross-reference, though, or would you do it on other types of issues or topics?

Aliza: No, I think it would be particularly political issues that I would do that kind of cross-referencing.

Interviewer: And you mentioned a few places that are your go-tos to double-check information. Do you think there are a few places that would be consistently these go-to places you would go to, to double-check?

Aliza: Oh, yeah, for sure. I feel like I have definitely curated, I guess, the news that I tend to get, as much as possible. I mean, as I said, you can open up your homepage on a browser and just get loads and loads of stuff from everywhere that’s quite obviously not true. But especially on my social media, I only really look at NPR, The Atlantic sometimes, which can be interesting, for more of a narrative perspective on things. The Economist, New York Times, Washington Post, and CNN occasionally, although they don't always have the best reputation.

Interviewer: So these ones that you're mentioning are the ones where you would first go to double-check something you'd read elsewhere, maybe?

Aliza: Yes. And it would definitely depend on what the issue was as well. For example, being from the US, if I want something like that is specific to my state or even my town, there would be ways that I would do that, like the local news channel, like 9NEWS, because The New York Times is probably not going to be covering what the actual local situation is. So looking at the Denver Post, 9NEWS, and things like that, and trying to get a range of information from there as well.

Interviewer: Have you ever looked at specific fact-checking websites to do that verification? There’s FactCheck.org and Snopes, I think, is another. Do you ever use those kind of websites?

Aliza: No, I haven’t. The closest thing to that that I have used is… I don't know if this is a thing here, but when it's election season or a voting season is coming up, the state or county or town sometimes will release a voter guide, which is basically saying, “This is an issue that you will be voting on. This is what people who say yes are talking about. This is what people who say no are talking about. These are the various ramifications of, say, this amendment coming in.” I use that. I rely on that pretty heavily when I do.

Interviewer: And is that produced by some kind of electoral commission, we might call it over here?

Aliza: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So just moving on a little bit now, but we will return to those things. Have you ever made a decision or taken some action based on something you've read as online news? Has it ever affected your actions or decision-making?

Aliza: Yeah. It's made me, for example, donate to certain causes or, like, investigate ways to support certain causes. So, for example, investigating how best to… Like, after George Floyd's killing, investigating what NGOs and charities are active in that specific situation? But then also, like, what about the national ones as well? And so, reading things like that in the news has made me, for example, donate to certain causes or start to follow certain causes more.

So I think I follow the Legal Defense Fund now on Instagram as a way to be just kept in the loop. I think that's probably the major one. Choosing whether or not you support particular or continue to support particular candidates in certain situations if something's come out about them and either their conduct or… Yeah. I didn't realise that this was just going to be… I didn't realise this about myself, but that it was going to be such a politically focused conversation. (Laughter)

I'm a lot more political than I thought I was, actually. Or, yeah, I guess, it's something like that you would take on board in lots of different situations. Like even travel plans, I guess. Like if you were planning to go to a certain region and then it comes out that there’s something like that's happened or thinking about safety concerns and things like that. Yeah.

Interviewer: Great. So let’s think about sharing stuff online now, because you already talked about you might share stuff with friends or family to get a second opinion. So what factors might you consider before sharing something, or what are the reasons you would share beyond that example I just gave?

Aliza: If I knew it was something like that was a common interest, with friends or with family, that this was something like that we all really cared about. So I would, for example, share an article with someone being like, “Oh, you know how we talked about this recently? I just saw this article about this.” That actually happens quite a bit where close friends and I will have a conversation about something and then literally two days later there will be an article about it and I'll be like, “Oh, we were just talking about this and look at what they've said. Everything that we said, we're so right.” All the time.

So it would be something like that. Or again, being like, “I saw this and this is really weird. Have you seen anything about this?” I also realise that I never ever share stuff on social media as in widely, and I think that's just from resulting… Almost like… Trauma I think is too strong of a word, but the quite distressing experiences of having Trump in office and people sharing stuff very, very widely with friends and family.

For example, posting on Facebook or on Instagram, and being like, “This isn't true, but how many people are going to read this and think this is true and this is going to lead to families having major bust-ups about this.” Yeah, so I really only share news stories with specific small groups of people or specific people in that sense. I never share anything very widely.

Interviewer: Still on social media, but direct messages, but also I guess WhatsApp, things like that?

Aliza: Yeah, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram Messenger.

Interviewer: So, you know, you talked about this downside you saw around people sharing to their networks things that were untrue, etc. So before you share a news article on social media or a messaging app, do you ever do any kind of fact-checking first?

Aliza: Not any formal fact-checking. I read it fully myself and just think about what I think about the source and what I think about the information that's in there. But I don't check it formally by using a fact checker or necessarily… occasionally, I'll cross-check it with other news sources. For example, like I said, if it is a breaking story, saying, like, “Oh, look at this that I saw on The Guardian. The BBC is also saying this, but the Associated Press is saying something different,” or something. Like, I might do something like that, but it's almost like personal vetting that I would be doing first.

Interviewer: I was just wondering if there were any other softer verifications and perhaps, you know, you said you don't necessarily go and do some research, but, you know, do other things make a difference to things that you might share more without thinking about it, like, certain trusted sources or whatever? Or would you just treat everything you share the same?

Aliza: No, not necessarily. I think, yeah, if I really trust the source, I won’t look into it as much, I guess, because I’ll have already decided that I trust it. And I guess it wouldn't also just be me. It would be, like, again, its reputation as whether or not it is a trusted source. Yeah.

Interviewer: So just on a similar note, have you ever shared something to someone with good intentions, or whatever, that turned out to be fake or misleading? Has something ever gotten through your net, as such?

Aliza: Yeah, I actually was just thinking about that. It doesn't really count as, like, news, but it was a good learning experience. A local restaurant. I should have thought critically about it because it was, in fact, April Fool's Day. However, it was a very poorly… it was an April Fool's post on their part in very, very poor taste. But basically, they were posting and saying, “This is our last week in business because of rising costs. We're having to close.” All stuff that has definitely happened to businesses recently.

And then it turned out that that was actually not a real thing, and everyone was actually really upset because it was, like, there are actually businesses who are posting this for real. Yeah, but I did immediately, as soon as I saw it, I sent it to my friend and was like, “Oh my God, this is so bad. It's just getting worse.” and she responded and was like, “Yeah, I'm pretty sure that it's just a really, really poor April Fool’s joke.” (Laughter)

And I should have thought a lot more critically about it, given that it was that day, but because it was something like that was so believable in just the general economic situation, I didn't even really think about it because I was, like, “Surely,” I mean, everyone knows that cost of goods have gone up and energy. And I was, like, “It is absolutely plausible that this is what has happened,” and I really should have thought about it more. But that was a good learning experience for me as well, to be like, “I need to keep digging, you need to keep thinking.”

But it was also in very, very poor taste, which I think was partially why I didn't even think about it. Because I was, like, “This is happening everywhere. And also, why would you joke about this? And this is actually happening everywhere.”

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s interesting stuff around the context. Yeah, exactly. There's another thing along these themes of questions I'm on at the moment. Have you ever changed your mind about an issue or a person based on some online news or information you've read?

Aliza: Yeah, for sure. In terms of a tangible example, I, along with many other, sort of, left-leaning voters in the US was not hugely a massive fan of Joe Biden when he became the candidate, but was also, like, “He is much better than the alternative. Very happy to accept this.” And then I read a really interesting article on The Guardian, I think last year, it was like a year or so after he came into office, saying, “He's actually one of the most radical presidents, and this is how.”

And there's this whole strategy of running as basically a moderate, and then when you get into office, actually being very, very radical. And that did make me… not totally re-evaluate, but very much reconsider my position with regards to him and thinking, “Oh, actually, you’ve made a very, very good point and that is something to consider going forward as well.”

Interviewer: Okay. That links to what I was going to ask you next potentially. So what I was going to ask you is, do you ever discuss news and stuff you've encountered online with friends and family, and how are these discussions shaped? How do they go? But then as an aside, just because you just said that I wonder if something like that, you reading something like that changed your opinion, would that be something you would make part of your discussions with friends or family?

Aliza: Yeah, definitely. I mean, I think the people who I surround myself with and I would hope that I am the same way, are open to the idea of potentially saying, “Oh, I hadn't thought about this. Maybe I could change my mind about this,” maybe even not totally, but being like, “Oh, I hadn't thought about this. I'm willing to assume this into my opinions now.” So, yeah, I mean, I think something like that is always on the table. And I've definitely had very frank conversations with my parents because we are just generally a very blunt family.

There's been loads of poll evidence recently about how you tend to become more socially conservative as you get older. And I was like, “No, I feel like this is something like that you both care about learning and being inclusive and changing your behaviour if it's necessary or considering new points of view.” And so, yeah, that is definitely something that we discuss. So, for example, if I hear them say something and I'm like, “Actually, you know, there's a lot of information about this and have you thought about looking into this more?”

They were both educators as well. So I feel like that's left them open to being, like, “We can't just assume that how we spoke about things 20 or 25, 30 years ago is still fine now. We need to maybe actually keep up with the times.” And it's an active thing as well that you have to sometimes actively pursue this information and be, like, “No, I'm going to do this,” as opposed to waiting for it to hit you.

Interviewer: And you think, in some way, that reading stuff yourself online to discuss this example or whatever, or even sending, sharing stuff you've read is part of that ongoing discussion?

Aliza: Oh, yeah, for sure. I think I recently sent both of my parents an infographic from the New York Times that said that baby boomers, both of which they are, have… it was a really high percentage of the wealth in the US. And I was, like, “Look, guys.” So, yeah. They haven't told me that they don't like that, but I also feel like they like to be well-informed. So I think, yeah, that is definitely part of our relationship, is my being, like, “Oh, this is you people.” (Laughter)

Interviewer: So we haven't touched on it much yet, but you mentioned it a couple of times of these, kind of, news sources you go to. So I think in there, you know, there's a really high number for The Guardian, the BBC, so you must have been on UK interests during that period a lot.

Aliza: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you tend to strictly rely on the same sources? Has that not changed much over time, or have you found yourself… apart from just the US-UK context, changing sources that you rely on more often at different times?

Aliza: Yeah, I think especially if someone I trust says that they refer to a news source a lot, I would test it out, and see if it sticks. Or when I was studying, I remember my professor saying, “You can't just read US news. You should also maybe look at Al Jazeera and see what Al Jazeera is saying, which might really surprise you in comparison to US News.” So sometimes it's been dictated by what I'm doing. But then, yeah, I do also base, in some sense, the news sources that I look at with what the people who I'm close to also refer to. Again, it's that trust aspect.

Interviewer: You're one of the few people that took part in this study whose source of news, in terms of websites, social media, your social media was smaller, so 33%. So just with that in mind, I guess, I’d just like to get your feelings on how do you feel about the role of social media, in particular, in disseminating news and information? And has that affected the way you trust the information you do encounter or the way you go about finding information?

Aliza: I mean, I think it plays a massive role because as you just alluded to, the majority of people get most of their news from social media, whatever social media outlet it is. Obviously, Facebook has played a massive role in the US when it comes to disseminating information, true or otherwise. I guess something that I noticed when I was doing this study is I would notice a news article that I wanted to find out more about where I was like, “Oh, this is interesting.” And I'd open the comments or the description, but that wouldn't be the whole story.

And I'd be like, “This blurb that they've written to describe what the story is going to be about doesn't actually say the whole story.” And so, I would go into the news website and be, like, “I want to actually read this,” as opposed to just relying on that blurb. But I doubt that very many people actually necessarily do that. They might just open the three-paragraph blurb and be like, “Oh, so that's what the situation is.”

And maybe they're 70% right, but there's probably a lot of information… well, there is a lot of information, not probably, more information actually contained in the full story. And I feel like there have been situations in the past where I have just looked at the headline or the little slideshow, and been like, “Oh, wow,” and then later read an article about the same thing and been, like, “That was totally different than what I was actually expecting it to be.” But that does concern me quite a bit then.

I mean, it feels a little bit rich, this coming from the person who definitely had a misstep on April Fool's Day when it came to fake news. But that people aren't thinking critically and are taking things on social media at such face value, even the article themselves, so not even doing cross-checking but not even reading the full content of a story and so not even getting the full picture of that, let alone whether or not it matches with anything else or is supported by anything else that's out there. So, yeah, it is a very tricky situation.

Interviewer: And just to be clear, I mean, a lot of the stuff you talked about there, you know, you're thinking about that as a social media problem rather than an online problem?

Aliza: No, I think it probably is… it can be extended to an online problem, but I think because people are so reliant on social media as a source of information, that that by default almost makes it more primarily a social media problem. And because the way that, for example, Instagram works is people want to grab your attention with a picture and very little text. It's kind of like that's almost the nature of the beast that you can't put all of the information into that format that you would put into a full article.

But then that's also potentially, people need to think more critically about the fact that that is how the information is presented, and so that's not the best way to get information from. So, social media has ended up being used for news and it probably isn't necessarily the best medium for disseminating news. But things have moved so quickly that it's not like anyone had time to be, like, “Oh, wait, hold on. This maybe isn't the best way to go about this.” (Laughter)

Interviewer: Staying around this idea of the online news and trust and stuff. Can you think of a time when you've just stopped following one particular source of news because you no longer trusted it? So, I guess, something you did follow for a while and then just thought, “Actually,” and just moved away from it altogether?

Aliza: Yeah, actually, I thought about this earlier in one of the questions when I mentioned CNN. I used to follow CNN religiously as a student. I think it was actually around the… was it MH 370, that Malaysian Airlines flight that went missing over the Indian Ocean? And no one still knows what happened there. I remember their reporting of it felt very, very… salacious is not the right word. Almost fetishising that there was a catastrophe. And just constant, constant, “We still don't know anything, but this is what we know.”

And it started coming out in lots of other news outlets saying, “What is CNN doing here? This is a very callous way of reporting things for the family, but also it's very out of step with how CNN seemed to do things up to that point.” And since then, I basically haven’t… I mean, occasionally I will look at CNN, but that did quite a number, I think, seeing, “This isn't useful reporting. It's just telling…”

I mean, people are really interested in this for both good and bad reasons, and just this stream of consciousness about information that may even not be there. Yeah. So I think it was a combination of my noticing it and being frustrated by it, but also seeing other news outlets saying, “What is going on here?” So, yeah, CNN died a death. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay. I'm just trying to make sense of that. Because that wasn't necessarily them doing, this is something that would turn out to be misleading or fake. It was more, I guess, standards they were setting.

Aliza: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, I mean, do you think that that's a really important thing to you about standards, or do you have any thoughts about the way, I guess, medias are regulated, which might be one and the same? And do you think that's an important aspect of where you lay your trust?

Aliza: For sure, yeah. I think that's especially evident in my podcast tastes. I love true crime podcasts. Who doesn't? But I'm super, super particular about how the situation is presented and who has made this true-crime podcast and what is the point and trying as much as possible not to consume, I guess, material that feels like it's sort of indulging in the salaciousness of it or the scandal, but being, like, “No, there's a point to this. And this has been conducted in a way that is sensitive to the people involved, but also that it adheres to some kind of journalistic standard.”

So, yeah, I think that is very, very important to me. And that's why I stick to this group, is because I think if it came out that, for example, one of these outlets had published something that didn't meet those standards, that would be quite widely known as well, in almost like a checks and balances from other news outlets. So yeah, I do think that level of integrity is quite important to me, as much as possible.

Interviewer: So I guess another sign of integrity is, you know, the development of new technologies, which has brought in things like deepfakes or AI-generated content, etc. How do you think the development of these technologies will affect people's ability to verify or validate the information they access online? I guess, actually, can I just do a pre-question before that?

Aliza: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think you can tell the difference between fake video, audio, and of AI-generated content versus genuine content?

Aliza: At the moment, probably not, because they are very, very good. I mean, well, I along with I think most of the world saw that there was that picture of the Pope in a puffer jacket that went absolutely viral. And then everyone suddenly was, like, “And it's fake.” And then there were people pointing out, actual, from what I understood, people who knew what they were talking about, saying, “There might be indications in this into it being fake, of shadows or slightly funny or slight distortions in the image,” but as just a lay person without any specified knowledge or training, you wouldn't know, just looking at it.

But I have definitely found, when I see a video online, I will find myself thinking, “Oh, I wonder if this is actually… like, is this real?” I question less if it's from one of my trusted sources. But even if I watch something on a news source that I trust, I will think, like, “Wow, if this is real, then this is crazy.” But always acknowledging that AI is so good at the moment. And again, as I said, me being just a layperson, that it's entirely possible that what I've seen is not 100% real or has been edited in some way.

But I think that's also something that I've always kept in the back of my mind because I studied art when I was in school. I mean, that would've been 20 years ago now. But that was something that they were even discussing about photography and art and being like, “Oh, but you don't actually know what this original picture looked like because things can be done to change the saturation and highlight certain things.” But yeah, and of course things have gone way, way, way beyond that since then.

Interviewer: Going back to what I said, then. What do you see the impact of these technologies being in the future on the way, particularly, we make sense of and verify information online?

Aliza: I think it's going to make it a lot harder. I mean, it's already quite difficult, I think, to suss out real information, in that sense, just because there's such a plethora of news outlets anyway that people get bombarded by news all the time and having to have that filter of, like, “Oh, but where did I see this? Where did this come from? Did I actually read what this article was about?” But then, yeah, it being much easier for something to actually be fake, as opposed to, like, for example, fabricated by not-great journalism, I think is just going to become even harder. I think it's a real challenge for the future.

Interviewer: Within that context, what steps do you think broadcasters and news producers can do to maintain their credibility?

Aliza: I mean, having people on staff who are experts in this I think would be quite important. Also, it's like a subset of I.T. or something, but people who are experts in AI, whether they're able to, like, run specific tests to verify if a video… when it was made and make as many checks as possible to say, “This seems to be legit.” And so being able to do that, I think, would go a long way. And being transparent about that as well. So, like, a news outlet saying, “This is a video that we are sharing. In order to share this, before sharing this video, it has undergone a series of tests,” or something, “by these people.

And so because of that, we believe, as far as is possible, that this is a real thing.” Because yeah, I think with things like deep fakes, news outlets could get into situations where they share something and they're like, “Yeah, we're pretty sure this is real.” And it’s like, “But how did you check? And if you never tell anyone how you checked, then how are they supposed to know that you've done your due diligence to try and make sure that it's real?” So yeah, transparency is a huge part of that as well, I think.

Interviewer: Great. I was going to ask you a specific question about new sources being transparent about their sources, but you’ve totally covered it. So that’s good. Okay. I'm going to move on to a final little theme of questions now, which is slightly different from what we just discussed, but related. How comfortable are you with the use of algorithms to personalise your news experience?

Aliza: I mean, I'm not an expert in it, and I would never say that I was an expert in it. I'm aware that definitely, there are things that happen in the background when I'm browsing Instagram or browsing the Internet that then do tailor things to me.

Interviewer: Are you comfortable with that?

Aliza: I definitely understand why it happens, because especially when it comes to selling stuff. You know, companies planting in your mind, “You were just looking at this. Don't you want to come back and spend more money?” (Laughter) I do definitely understand that. There have definitely been times where I've noticed something and I'm like, “That is actually really creepy.” I'm not massively into the idea that, like, for example, if a friend shared a link with me and then all of a sudden I'm getting ads for something, I'm like, “That is a little bit creepy.”

Interviewer: But in terms of news as well, specifically. So, you know, I guess you mentioned on some homepages or whatever that you get, “You must be interested in these new stories.” I mean, what about that aspect of it, slightly away from the advertising business models?

Aliza: I don't think about those too much because when I do have a look at them, I'm kind of like, “What is all of this? This is definitely not anything that I'm interested in.” And even if there is a headline where I'm like, “Oh, I wonder what that is about,” I don't usually go navigate there from that homepage, I would rather look somewhere else or look for it on my own terms as opposed to just using the options that have been presented to me.

Interviewer: Okay. So you don't tend to use any of these different Apple, Google, whatever else, “Hey, look at some news”?

Aliza: No. So, for example, hilariously, for the past three months, couple of months, I noticed that my Microsoft Edge homepage has been simultaneously telling me that Britain's going to freeze and it's going to be really, really cold. But also it's going to be really, really hot because of a massive plume of hot air from Africa. And sometimes it will literally happen on the same day, where it’s, like, “Britain braces for cold weather,” “Britain is bracing for hot weather.” I'm, like, “Well, which is it?”

I'm not going to find this out from these pages. I'm going to find it out by looking at the Met Office or something. I will go and be like, if that's something I actually want to find out information about, I will go somewhere else to find it. I'm not going to interact with the stuff that shows up on my homepage, especially because a lot of it is just, like, I don't know, stuff about Daniel Craig's spouse and things where I'm just like, “This is not either interesting or believable anyway, so this is just not how I would go about finding this information.” (Laughter)

Interviewer: We know you better than the Edge homepage, then.

Aliza: (Laughter)

Interviewer: So, you're aware of this personalised news feed, though, so a lot of people will just go to the Apple News and Google if you have an Android phone, and just go, “Interested in these stories?” Also all the homepages for Edge, blah, blah, blah. So, what do you think, and even with social media, there’s certain prioritisation of things that, blah. So what do you think are going to be the impacts over time of these personalised feeds, in terms of what different people are exposed to?

Aliza: I mean, I think it can definitely create an echo chamber where you're only aware of what you're being told to be aware of because you've said what it is you're interested in. And that if you don't push yourself to go beyond that, then you're not going to go beyond that. So, yeah, I think, again, in terms of people needing to really take responsibility to think critically about the information that's being presented to them. I mean, something that I keep thinking of is when Trump was elected in 2016.

A lot of people in the US and around the world were saying, “This is ridiculous. How could this happen?” And it's like, “What do you mean, “How could this happen?” Like, if you'd actually been following the news, you'd seen that there were loads of unhappy people.” Whether or not I agree with them, but you can't just react and say, like, “This isn't possible.” It's like, well, clearly it is. It happened.

So now we need to figure out how it happened as opposed to, like, or have we been ignoring signs because we've been closing ourselves off to the fact that there are loads of people out there who do not think the same way as we do. So yeah, I think that's something that's going to need to happen a lot more. Because it's sometimes really nice to stay in your echo chamber and be, like, “Everyone believes the same as me. Isn't it great that I'm right all the time?” But that's obviously not the case. And so needing…

Or even if you are right all the time, which would be amazing, you still can't predict how other people are thinking and feeling and responding to a situation. And so needing to understand how other people are thinking can give you a lot more information about then what the general social situation is or the general economic situation is.

Yeah, so I think people are going to need to push themselves more. Unless news outlets just start with a wildcard article (Laughter) in your algorithm so that 98% of what you get is stuff that is related to what you ask for, and then they just throw in a wildcard and see if people start noticing that.

Interviewer: Great. Well, you know, I think that is all in terms of my questions. That’s not all of the questions but it’s all of the ones I felt like asking. So I guess we’ve got a bit of time left. So I’ll just ask, you know, is there anything else around these topics we've been discussing that you want to talk about or share? Is there anything that's popped into your head while we've been chatting that you didn't get a chance to speak about yet?

Aliza: No, I don't think so. I feel like when something has popped in my head, there's then been a question about it, and I've been, like, “Yes, this is why I remembered this.”

Interviewer: I guess, like, the book. Is there anything in there that you think is surprising or shocking, or is there anything about it you find…?

Aliza: This word cloud is amazing. I love that one of the big words is ‘car’.

Interviewer: Do you see where these words came from?

Aliza: Quite a few of these, yeah. They make sense compared to, like, just based on what I tend to pay attention to.

Interviewer: On page six, you've got this trust familiarity blob. And I guess what that shows is what you’ve talked to me about is that you're very familiar and very trusting because you go to things you trust solely to find out information.

Aliza: Yeah. And if I look at something that isn't something that I usually go to, I trust it less. Like The Chronicle, which I do occasionally look at, but I am always, kind of, like, “Hmm. We’ll see.”

Interviewer: So you go to where you feel safe and comfortable, and that's where you're getting your information from. I guess you spoke about, you know, avoiding certain parts of it altogether rather than trying to engage.

Aliza: I also like that trees and forests was its own subcategory.

Interviewer: Any ideas? Do you read a lot of stuff about trees and forests?

Aliza: I do remember there was one article that was about a rewilding project in Manchester that had then gotten shot down because they tested the soil and it was super polluted. But that's been in the news loads recently about pollution of rivers and stuff like that.

Interviewer: But we also have the caveat on there. It's difficult to pinpoint specific interests because the range of topics is quite diverse. So, some people had big, big blue circles, one thing, and some little circles, but you were too diverse.

Aliza: I did have a moment when I opened it and I was, like, “The monarchy?” and then I was like, “No, I did actually read a lot about that.” (Laughter) It's, like, “I'll be honest, I read a lot about that.”

Interviewer: Great. Well, I'm going to turn… I forgot to turn that one on until halfway through.

Aliza: This is hilarious also.

END AUDIO

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