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START AUDIO

Interviewer: You should get it.

Fran: Yes, I’ve accepted.

Interviewer: Great. Okay. We’ll start off with a few simple ones, just around the book. So, in the book it shows the times of day that you shared your news with the diary. Does this seem to accurately reflect when you think you read online news and when you engage with online news?

Fran: Yes, absolutely. The only bits that I think it missed are omissions that I omitted, accidentally, myself. So, if I’d been sent publications at work, or something like that. That was a lot more difficult to move across, just because of the nature of the study that it was, obviously, on a personal device rather than a work device. Yes, that’s exactly when I engaged with news, to sort of round off my day, both ends, really.

Interviewer: Have you noticed any patterns or trends in the way that you consume news over time? Has there been an increase or decrease in the amount of time that you’ve spent reading articles?

Fran: I wouldn’t say so. I think it’s more dependent on hit and miss incidents that are going on in the world. If there’s something that I’m particularly interested in, then I’ll look at it, but I’ll look at it from several different angles, as well. So that increases my time, because I would normally read an article from a couple of points of view, if I really wanted to know the truth to it. So, obviously, that’s doubling your amount of time that you spend consuming media.

Interviewer: Okay. So, from what you’ve said there, I would say you’re someone that, typically, reads beyond just headlines and stuff. You really look at a couple of different sources around the same issue or topic. From the book that I’ve given you, it shows that you’re drawn to issues of political investigations, conflicts, but also sports and it also came up with stuff around parental issues.

Fran: Yes.

Interviewer: So, what is it that makes you gravitate towards issues or topics at different times?

Fran: I think if we’d done my news consumption two weeks’ later, they possibly would have been different. But they were hot topics in the world, at that point. The parental concern covers- I’m sure it was the point where the Conservative government came out and said that they were going to extend free children’s care to one-year-olds, down to one-year-olds. But nobody knew the answer to the actual questions that I needed the answer to, personally.

So, it took a few days of going on several sources, to actually get to the bottom of what they were promising. They said, “Oh, we’re going to make childcare free from one year old.” But that’s not true at all until 2025. So, for that, that’s a trending topic, because I had to go back to several news sources, like, on repetitive days, to actually get down to what it was going to mean for me.

What it means for me, personally, is that it won’t help me when I go back to work, for the six months after I’ve gone back to work, I’ll still pay full price. Then, it will 15 hours, and then a full year later, it will actually be 33 hours. I think the same goes with- in terms of the political conflict. I think I probably looked at the conflict in Sudan, on one source, but then looked at it again from a couple of different angles.

So, I think a reflection on myself is that I consume hot topic media. I’m quite influenced by what’s pushed at me, but then I like to try and find the answers or my own view on the story from a few different sources. So, I’ll get it, probably- It’ll be pushed to me on social media, someone’s view of what this hot topic is, and then I’ll look around it a little bit more.

But because, obviously, the last two weeks, if I reflect on them now, have been quite quiet, in terms of- well, the war in Ukraine is a great example. When that first kicked off, I wanted to know everything about it. I wanted to know all the different sources and everything else, but because that’s quietened down in the media, it’s something I’m aware that’s happening, but I’m not looking for it, anymore.

I’m not consuming that on a daily basis anymore, which, it still is a larger problem, it’s just not being pushed at me, so I’m not searching out more for it.

Interviewer: So, there are a couple of things just to follow on from what you said there. How often do you encounter something online, some information and news online that you suspect is either completely fake, or at least, in some way, misleading?

Fran: Daily.

Interviewer: Yes. Where do you typically encounter this kind of news that you suspect is misleading? Is there any particular kind of examples, or online spaces where this happens?

Fran: Social media, obviously, pushes through adverts that are quite often false, whether it’s on TikTok or Facebook. Instagram is probably less bad than the other two mentioned. That can be just completely false. But also, somewhere that I find it quite a lot, is our homepage, you know, when you click Newcastle University and you just click onto Microsoft Edge, it will give you, is it, like, MSN news or something, or Windows news.

You can see that they’re attempting to have a balanced view, but you’ll get something from ‘The Star’ or ‘The Sun’ that is just so inflammatory that it’s not true. So, they’re probably like the three places, and that can spark my interest as well. Even stuff like, if we’ve been pushed, like, the true narrative for some of our press releases, for the work that we do at the university.

So, you’ll see it that we’ve released it to BBC, ‘The Chronicle’ and somewhere else. The inflammatory view from ‘The Chronicle’ is just all the crabs are going to die, that’s it, that the end of the world. Then, you actually read the quotes from the professor that’s done the study and you’re like, “I’m not sure that’s what they were saying.” (Laughter) I think it’s just about being mindful of source, really.

Interviewer: I think that’s something I’m going to speak about, as well, once we move on, in terms of specifically where we imagine the sources, and how far back we go to stop at a source. But we’ll get onto that, I think. I just want to follow up with some stuff from what you said earlier. You talk about checking different sources and things like that. Is there a particular place you’d go to first, to double-check a piece of information, or find a trusted view on a topic?

Fran: I wouldn’t say I’ve got a trusted view of any mainstream media. The typical triangle for me would be, like, if it’s pushed at me, from either ‘The Sun’ the ‘Mail’ or something like that, that’s been click-baited in social media, then I’ll probably go a little bit left a little bit right, and then local, if I need to, to ‘The Chronicle’. So, ‘The Guardian’ ‘The Telegraph’ and the ‘Mail’, in that sort of central, leftist, rightist view.

It’s just about, I think, you have to, at this point, read critically. I don’t think there is anywhere that you could go for true non-biased information at this point. You have to read between the lines and see what’s the same and what’s different on each, and then pick out what you choose to consume.

Interviewer: So, on that then, I guess, do you often-? From your responses it doesn’t seem like you’ve told us you do this much, but do you often share online information in either messaging groups, or online, social media or by email?

Fran: Very rarely. I just don’t think there’s a voice out there that represents what I believe. So, passing it on to someone else, I would have to pass it on with critique. Sometimes, I’m quite busy and I live quite a fast-paced life. So, in conversation I would possibly discuss topics and say, “X and Y had this view, and Y and Z had this view,” but I wouldn’t push the source on, if I don’t think that it’s a true representation of how I feel about something, or a view on a topic that I agree with.

I don’t have time for the discourse that would then come from that, from my friends, as well. They would ask the same questions.

Interviewer: That makes sense. You’ve talked about finding different sources and there being this kind of- unsure about this single version of what you think would be true or fact, and there being these various discourses, and stuff like that. So, I think I probably know what you’re going to say about this, but I need to ask anyway. I guess in a simple way, have you ever changed your mind about a topic or an issue, or a person, based on stuff you’ve encountered online?

You seem like someone who has got views about whatever, and you want to find the truth around the parenting thing, but has there ever been a thing where you’ve held one view and then you’ve read stuff online as part of your research, and it has completely changed your view?

Fran: Yes, if you get to the source. I think, at the moment that’s something that does happen to me, quite a bit, because I’m going into a new phase of my life where I’m going to be a parent, and therefore I’m more easily click-baited by stuff like, I don’t know, Lullaby Trust, kids should stay in their parents’ room for six months, for example.

So, when I first started on that topic, I had the conversation with my husband, and I was like, “No, the NHS says that you have to stay in for six months, that’s the rule. They’re staying in our room for six months.” My husband was like, “I need you to look into this properly.” He was like, “You do research as a job. Find me the papers that tell me that it’s six months. Find me them [Fran], and I will fully support your decision.”

So, I started looking and I looked in ‘The Lancet’ or wherever else I could possibly find this information, and I looked in the footnotes of the Lullaby Trust, which is obviously the supported website for the NHS. Actually, six months probably isn’t true, it’s four months. That’s where you get the massive dip. You go down from about 30%, I can’t remember the exact numbers of potential SIDS, to about 2% at four months. But it’s just the buffer when they’ve done the analysis, for children’s ages and different seasons, and everything else.

I have completely changed my mind. If we feel comfortable at four months now, but nobody will ever, ever publish an article that says it’s safe for a child to sleep outside of your room after four months, because it doesn’t take the analysis and the interrogation of the data, and the different factors into play. So, yes, it isn’t a conversation that I would then go and have with my midwife, because she’ll go, “No, six months, you’ve got to do six months.”

But absolutely, I think you’ve got to do your own research, but there is also a lot of privilege associated with being able to do that research.

Interviewer: Yes, even just access ‘The Lancet’ articles.

Fran: Understanding, because I think when it comes to authority, you naively believe what you’re told. But parenting is like this whole different ballgame of life that I’ve never had to experience before, where everyone has got an opinion and no country can agree on what is safe. Everyone is using their own numbers and has a different agenda. So, absolutely yes, and that’s like the perfect example, recently.

It did take some pushback from him, because I was just willing to accept it, because it’s the NHS guidance, which is really stupid, because I know what the NHS guidance is, in several areas, this being my job. I also know it’s nonsense, but in this instance, I was just like, “I’m just going to believe it.”

Interviewer: So, you talk there about this one particular thing that you discussed with your husband, and you’ve explained that quite well. What I was going to ask, just to push a bit further on that is, you’ve said two things. You’ve talked about your friends and that you wouldn’t, necessarily, share things online with your friends, because you know that they might have the same kinds of questions are you, and you don’t want them to think that’s your opinion.

You’ve mentioned something around issues of parenting where you really go into research more and think, “I need to find out so I can make an informed decision,” especially to win an argument against your husband, which is always a good thing, I suppose. But are there any other times that you discuss, say, outside of parenting, which is really close to home at the minute, but say, these other kinds of news stories?   
  
Are there any other times that you can tell me about, where you discuss that with family or friends? How do these conversations, typically, go? So, if you could think of any other topic other than parenting and think of discussing that with family or friends.

Fran: So, quite often, because of the social circle that I sit within, we discuss a lot of crime as well, because I’m quite close with a few police sergeants in different areas. So, that can change my view and my narrative as well, because obviously, they can’t tell you any more information than that’s already out there, but you can question something and say, “This didn’t seem quite right to me,” and get a little bit more understanding in that sense.

So, there are instances where we’ve said- a good example linked back to sport is when Joelinton got done for drink-driving the other week.

Interviewer: Oh, yes, a Newcastle player, yes.

Fran: Yes, a Newcastle player got done for drink-driving. At first, it didn’t come out with his alcohol level or alcohol content in his bloodstream. It was quite an interesting several-day conversation with friends and family, where some would say, “You shouldn’t have a drink and drive, that’s it. He should be banned. He should be fined his wages,” and he should be this, he should be that.

Whereas my friends who are police officers said, “That’s really close to the line.” Before it even came out, they didn’t know the information, they just knew that this has been leaked to the press, you can tell. He hasn’t been arrested. They pulled him into X police station, that’s going to come out in a couple of days, that if they’d done another lap of the block, he wouldn’t have been over the limit.

It was like, sitting in the middle of that conversation where someone has a working knowledge of it, and they were absolutely right. Two days later it came out and he was 0.2 over the limit. He’d had two glasses of wine. They said, if they’d done another lap of the block, or if they’d driven the long way back to the station, he wouldn’t have been over the limit.

Someone has done a job there that they wanted to do, in pulling him over. Whereas the narrative on the other side, of people who didn’t have that extra underlying knowledge, really changed. I was just sat in the middle like, “I honestly don’t know.” I had what I was consuming in the media, I had very inflammatory views from, mainly, my dad who was like, “No, if he's drinking and driving, he should be this,” or that and the other, and then friends who were the other way around.

Then, when it all tailed out and he’d had two glasses of wine and then drove home, and that was him over the limit, it was a bit more, “Well, that could happen to anyone.” That’s not a massive amount if he’s had two glasses of wine with dinner. I wouldn’t, personally, have done two. But that’s understandable. So, yes, in that sense that was a scenario where, if anything, the media made no help in that scenario, because they were just reporting the highest level that they could, falsely.   
  
“Oh, he’s been charged. He’s had to apologise,” he’s had to do this, he’s had to do that, trying to make it as big as they possibly could, rather than it just being seen as a learning error, or a mistake. But the truth of it is, he was still over the limit, he’d broken the rules. I mean he did serve whatever he needed to do in terms of law, but the knock-on effect for his career was another conversation to have.

If you or I had too much to drink, got pulled over, nobody would know. I wouldn’t call my boss and go, “Oh, by the way, last night I’ve done this.” So, it’s just about that question of having such a public life, and that came out of that. So, it was a conversation that went on for days and days, and days. Every time I had a conversation with somebody else, my views on it flipped back and forwards. I still can’t pin it down.

Interviewer: Are you more likely to discuss news with family or friends if it’s something that’s really relevant? I just think in the two examples you give, you’re talking about issues of parenting, which is obviously really topical and relevant now. You’re also talking about a local footballer. So, I’m imagining a lot of your friends and family support that team. So, that’s not just a random, famous person getting caught drink-driving, the fact is, you and your friends know him, it’s local, it’s mega-local.

He probably got pulled over by the local police who you’ve spoken to, on a local road. Do you think there is anything in that kind of assumption I’ve made, or is there any chance you would be discussing stories with your family and friends about Ukraine war, for example, or about something that’s happening in another part of the world? Or do you not think there’s a line there? Do you think you would just discuss anything?

Fran: I think, the conversations would be a lot more lengthy about stuff that everyone has in common. There are instances where people in my social circle, who have external interests or external connections- One of my closest friends is Canadian, so we discuss a lot of things that are very close to home for her, in Canada, even though she now lives in England.

So, sometimes she’ll bring up something that is close to home for her that she feels she needs to talk about, that we will have to then look into, or look at, to be able to discuss with her. But that would normally be- she’d normally give us some forewarning for that, and of course, she’d @ us, as in, “Have you seen what’s going-? I can’t believe that this has happened back home,” is what she would say.

We could then look into that. But I think there’s definitely something in topics that are closer to me, being something that we would discuss more.

Interviewer: Do you think that’s because, even though you might disagree, you know, Joelinton, whether it was right or wrong, whether they were a little bit over the limit, those conversations I can imagine happening, but do you think there is a kind of- Is it a safer thing to discuss things like that, because you’re less likely to find big disagreements? Or is it just that you read about an array of topics, but do you just think you’ll only discuss news with people that you know, if you think they’ll be interested in it, or they’ll already know about it, like, what’s going on?

Fran: Yes, I don’t think, when it comes to news, you would try and spark a conversation with someone, if you didn’t know that they would be able to have that conversation back with you. So, a lot of the time it is not particularly deep, low-level topics that you would discuss. But equally, I don’t think there’s a particular forum, at the moment, for me in my life, or enough emotional capacity to deal with some of the bigger topics, and to be having those conversations about bigger topics, at the moment.

I think there was definitely those points, a few years ago in my life, like when I was just out of university and when I wasn’t as busy, when I wasn’t trying to juggle home-life, work-life and everything else. There was a lot more space and capacity in those university years, to be a lot more diverse in my thinking and have depth of thought. But now it’s a lot more safest level, like, reactive is how I would describe my response to media now.

Whereas at points it was very proactive while I was a lot younger, and there was more time and space.

Interviewer: Do you think that’s just because of what you said? Do you think that is just because, you know, as you say, your lifestyle has changed in that time, and you have responsibilities?

Fran: I think there is also some cynicism in there. As you get a bit older you realise that no matter how much you do, per se, these big changes are going to come anyway, and it’s almost- there is only so much you can do. I think the best example, and it would be silly not to mention it now, is the last General Election. From my view of media, from what I had on social media, and from what I was pushed, from all the conversations I was having with family and friends, it was going to be a very close election.

It looked like, in my view of the world that that was going to be a Labour government, and it was a Tory landslide. It just proved to me that my view of the world is what the world wants me to see. From that point onwards, I immediately distanced myself from social media so quickly, from that election. It really, really gave me a shock. Genuinely, the world that had been created for me online, did not exist. It wasn’t the one that was on the outside world.

I think I’m more aware of that now, whereas when I was at university in my 20s, I felt more- I could make change, I could defeat the world. These big topics were nothing for me to tackle, whereas now, I’m just a bit more like, “Actually, I’m just one of a lot. When my focus is on X, Y and Z, then I can’t expect to make a change in other areas. You are just too busy, you’re too stretched.”

I think that sort of fire to make intellectual change in the world has just got smaller as I’ve got older.

Interviewer: Is there something in that, from what you’ve said around, you know, you discussed it as a cynicism, but it’s this idea that to invest a lot of time and energy into a topic that, essentially, you may not be able to do anything about, because of your own time restrictions. Is there a sense that you would invest your time in reading stuff online, if you can do something about it, or it's something you can discuss, something really practical about, “How long do I keep the cot in the room?” Is that a fair summary of what you’re saying?

Fran: Yes, absolutely. I think it’s a general change with age, and I think it will continue in this fashion until, potentially, such a point in my life that my priorities realign, and maybe when I come to retire, I can be a political activist. But until then, I’m going to be pretty busy. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, I’ve got a three-year-old, by the way, so I’ve still got very recent memories of all this. So, you’ve mentioned also, and I said I was going to come back to this question, so I will. I think you’ve covered it already with the last few things you’ve said. You’ve said already that maybe there isn’t this idea of something being trustworthy, or really factual, but I guess you mention different news sources where you might go to get, at least, some balance in your head.

I guess, if you are going to think something is a representation of a truth, where is that source? Where do you get it from? For example, because that might seem an odd question, might you be willing to trust something if somebody you trust sent you it on WhatsApp? Or would you always look at, is that ‘The Mail’, is that ‘The Sun’? Or would you even go and look at which journalist wrote that?

So, ‘The Mail’ is all the same, and actually it’s not different journalists might be more trustworthy, or even further back than that, I guess. Would you even go back as far as press agencies?

Fran: Well, for me, I don’t really dabble in journalists and those sorts of things. I prefer to look immediately at the quality of the work. So, as in, have you properly sourced where you got that from? Have you pulled that graph from somewhere? Can I find that graph and can I find the summary, myself, to see whether that’s true or false? One of the main things that I’ll look for is the source of the picture.

So, I’ll be like, “Is that true? Who took that? Where was it? Do we actually know that the photograph that they’re taking at that point was taken where they’re saying it was now?” Because for me, it’s not- like, how somebody writes doesn’t really interest me that much, if you can see inflammatory wording very easily, you can understand a tone and a bias quite easily.   
  
But whether or not I would trust something, probably comes down to if I had the same source information, and I can prove that the same source information came from valid sources, and can I see how this person came up with this conclusion. Yes, or no. Then, I would be quite willing to, not trust it, but I would believe that it’s a fair representation, in their opinion of what they saw, or they knew.

But would I trust it? I would still rather have my own thoughts about, is that the same conclusion that I would have come to.

Interviewer: Yes. You mentioned ‘valid’ rather than ‘trust’.

Fran: Yes.

Interviewer: Which I guess is like, yes, that’s kind of an interesting way of thinking about it. So, do you think it’s important that news sources are transparent about their sources, also their methods of reporting? Do you think that affects your willingness to trust it or consider it valid?

Fran: Yes, I think that’s the only way that they’re going to survive. But then, that’s also a very biased view which I have from my social circle, that people aren’t willing to accept what mainstream media are pushing out anymore, as people are getting- I think the older generations are willing to accept it, because that’s the way that it’s always been. But as people are, I’d say, even the generation below me, are even more hot on this sort of topic of non-acceptance of mainstream media views.

I think the only way that they will survive, or thrive, more importantly, with the younger generations is through openness and transparency. But I say that, and then at the same time, clickbait is a thing. So, how do those two things exist in the same world, I simply don’t know, because it obviously works, clickbait. But what people are saying and, potentially, what people are doing, maybe it’s not the same thing.

Interviewer: Yes, I’m just smiling because a lot of the things you’re bringing up are, actually, on my list of questions. Yes, do you think it’s possible for people to balance that kind of clickbait, kind of, algorithmic, “Here’s your personal newsfeed,” with the need to stay informed and be able to trust in information? Do you think that you are able to find that balance? Is that what you’re worried about with younger generations, will they bother, or will they be able to find that balance?

Fran: I think it’s incredibly difficult. There are some articles that I’ll see as clickbait that I just will not engage with, for simply I cannot engage with that, because that will impact my algorithm and then I’ll get more of it. I’m like, “No, do not click that,” because it can be on important topics. If it’s an important topic I will not, I will not allow myself to be fully click-baited.

I think there’s the sidebar of shame, for example, you know, ‘The Daily Mail’ sidebar of shame. I have no qualms with being click-baited by a sidebar of shame, if that’s something that I think, “Oh, is that what that person was up to that day.” To me, that’s not informative, that’s not media, it’s just nonsense, isn’t it? I think the line and the boundary between where you’ll allow yourself to just wander off into this little world of, like, what somebody performed at a concert and be click-baited by that is fine.

But if you then wanted to learn more about, I don’t know, endangered animals, I’m not going to be click-baited by someone’s view on an endangered species. It’s something that you need to look at yourself, and I think it will take a lot of self-regulation and a lot of learning, to know which- they’re like two different media sets, for me, in that’s the way that I have to try and look at them.

But finding that middle ground, I don’t doubt, is constantly changing of where my personal line is, with what I will be proactive and reactive to.

Interviewer: Yes. So, on that idea of regulating and stuff like that, do you think- You’ve talked about how media can survive and thrive, do you think that- Well, first of all, actually, do you think that state broadcasters should be subject to different regulations, to private examples, or have different standards, at least, than privately-owned news outlets?

Fran: I think they should be what ‘good’ looks like. But I think everyone should have to live up to the same standards. I think there should be more regulation around news outlets, but the BBC should be exemplary in that. They should be leading by example, because of the way that they are funded, and the way that they’re run. I think we’re so far from that, that I’m really not sure what the future of state media is, to be honest. I don’t think anyone is, at this point.

Interviewer: What steps do you think state broadcasters, the BBC, could take to gain this kind of trustworthiness and credibility, in this age of distrust in the media, type of politicisation. I’ll give you the job as Director General. What are you going to do?

Fran: You’d have to replace at least 60% of the nepotised staff. Where would you even start? No, I don’t think it’s got a hope in hell, having known someone that worked in the BBC in London, it’s lads, lads, lads and jobs for the boys. When you get above the age of 30, yes, there are probably some fantastic ground source journalists who have fought their way through university and want to do a good job.

But if you’re led by whoever is in power, who puts you in place, which, essentially, the BBC typically does end up long into whichever Prime Minister’s mate is in office at that point, I don’t think you’re ever going to have a fully trusted source. I think they do try. I’ve seen a couple of times on a Sunday morning, they’ll have where they news-check themselves. But it’s just nonsense.

It’s comedy media, it’s like, “Do you know when that should have happened? Before you put it out in the press.” A little bit too late. It’s like, “Oh, there are 17 horses in that field.” “Has anyone counted them?” “Oh, we were reporting on Tuesday there were 17 horses, there were actually two.” It’s like, “No, that’s not good enough. You need someone to check.” It’s just a little bit- If someone offered me it, I’d say, “No, thank you.” (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes. You did mention before, this idea of being more open about sources and methods. But then I guess you’ve talked about a level above that. It’s not about being just open about the methods for journalists. It’s about being open about who are the journalists and who are the management structures in the broadcasters.

Fran: But you would find it in any other company. Is it only a matter of time? We talk about the dinosaur institutions which, in every company I’ve worked for since I left university, there’s a 60-something dinosaur that doesn’t want to retire and doesn’t want to change, at the top of every organisation. We’re waiting for them to die out. There’s no other way to say it, because they’re not going to retire. These people will never retire. This is their life. This is their business, and this is what they have always done.

They won’t change. The people below them can implement equality and diversity and they can implement all of these strategies and thinking. But nine times out of ten, the dinosaur at the top, nothing will change until his vote no longer exists. I think there is a similar view of that in state media, as in nothing will change until the government changes. The government change and then a different mate will be in office.

But then the trickle-down effect still won’t happen. It’s almost like the tone at the top. What have we got, really? We’ve got a monopoly of media in this country, where Murdoch owns 90% of these outlets. Then, you’ve got the BBC and that’s run by whoever is in government. There is nothing. There is no way that you can freely consume news and media, in my opinion.

Whereas others might be really happy with that. If you were strong, like, a stone-charred Tory, you might be sat there going, “This is my paper and I love it,” do you know what I mean? “Everything they say is true, and I can believe everything they say.” Yes, honestly, it’s not a nice topic and I can certainly see why it would be a very good research study. (Laughter)

Interviewer: The other side of that, and so we’re talking about these huge institutions that what people in the past, typically, relied on as the purveyors of valid information, and obviously you spoke about how you think that’s really broken down. But the other side of that, which we touched on a little bit, is the hyper-personalised newsfeeds. You talked about social media after the 2019 General Election has been an eye-opening moment for you.

Fran: Yes, massively.

Interviewer: You talked about the MSN feed. So, what do you think-? I guess you’ve talked about the fact that you’re not really comfortable with that, in some way.

Fran: No, I just choose to disengage from it. But because of the election that was, literally, a turning point in my engagement with media, because I can’t express how much of a staunch reality it was, that the reality that I thought existed, didn’t just not exist, like, it was a Tory landslide. So, my view of the world was this 32%. But that’s what I genuinely believed was the world. It was like waking up and going, “Oh, my God, 70% of everything around me, I didn’t know existed. How have I allowed this to happen?”

Then, I picked up my phone and I was like, “This is how,” because I continued to look. I was like, “There’s still none of the 70%.” I still couldn’t find it without actively searching for it. It was just a massive turning point for me where I was just like, “I am totally not comfortable with personalised everything. Personalised ads, personalised newsfeed, like, I don’t want it and I don’t want it to be personal to me, I want to have a view, a 360 view of the world.

I don’t want the world to revolve around me. That’s what these algorithms are trying to create. In my experience, with that election, it was awful. It can only create total shock. So, yes, it’s not for me, but how do you disengage from that? I’m honestly not sure without giving more and more time to this research, and these views and investigations which, again, is just totally juxtaposed to being able to live your life.

Interviewer: Yes.

Fran: So, maybe again, that shows you why I just skim the top-level surface. When something is important, it takes so long to get to enough truthful and valid information, to be able to make a decision that, if you did that for everything, you couldn’t have a life.

Interviewer: Yes, and I guess the social contract that may have existed, might have been we, as busy people doing our jobs, don’t have time to do that. So, we trust that the media or journalists will do that research for us. I think what you’re saying is that social contract is now broken.

Fran: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: So, the only way for you to be sure, is to become a journalist yourself, on top of your job, basically.

Fran: Yes, and you can only do that for topics that really impact your life.

Interviewer: You can only do that- You’ve got a limited resource, so you can only do that for things that matter to you now.

Fran: Yes, or for topical conversations like Joelinton’s drink-driving. If that’s going to be an hour’s long conversation on a Friday, at the pub, then you can do that, because it’s an enjoyable topic that you can debate from a few sides, but ultimately, it’s not that deep.

Interviewer: Yes. Just one last thing then, because that was a good place to add, actually, but then that’s what my brain does. So, something like the Joelinton story, do you feel that you know people in the pub are going to talk about that, and I know this is a hypothetical thing. People in the pub are going to talk about Joelinton, so you need to check what it is, check what you think about it or, at least, get a little bit of background.

Fran: Yes, well, we know that- We discuss hot topics, the group of us that meet on a Friday in the pub. We always discuss hot topics of the week, so you know it’s going to come up. In the same way that on, I don’t know, if we do the pub quiz before Easter, you’re going to look up ‘Easter’, because you know there’s going to be a round on it.

It’s the same with that you’ll prepare for an evening with friends. It’s also completely fine to not have an opinion and that’s okay. That’s great, but you still want to be able to engage in a meaningful conversation and nobody would say that you were wrong or give you a dressing down for what you’ve thought.   
  
But nobody wants to be the one who comes to the table with the least to offer, and then walking away with your tail between your legs because, actually, you didn’t look into something correctly, the same as you would with anything else. I think, as I’ve got older, my social circle is a lot smaller, and it’s people who will challenge my views, but from similar angles. It gets to a point where I don’t have time to have lunch with someone who wants to build on the greenbelt,

Do you know what I mean? I might have been able to do that 10 years ago, but that would just be emotionally and physically exhausting for me now, when someone is like, “Oh, no, let’s build on greenbelt, instead of brown.” I’m like, “Oh, my God, I can’t.” I just walk away. So, I think there’s something in that, as well.   
  
That’s why I don’t send on media articles to my friends, because they would have the same view as me, and probably consume media in a similar way. I’d be sending them down the rabbit hole, as well.

Interviewer: Yes, I think, sending things to your circle, your friends, your network, you almost feel like what stops you doing that is because that becomes a burden for them to-

Fran: Yes, massively.

Interviewer: Yes, okay. Great. Well, that’s all the questions I have. So, that was really interest for me. Thank you for being open and honest, and sharing.

Fran: No problem.

Interviewer: As I said in all the information I sent out, this is part of a bigger research project and you become anonymous in that, and all the rest of it, you know how it works.

Fran: Yes, I do.

Interviewer: So, I’ll be in touch with sending you the stuff that I need to send you.

Fran: No problem.

Interviewer: Other than that, I know you’re on maternity leave, or whatever, but I’m not going to disappear now. If you want to get in touch with me by email about this, or whatever else, just feel free. Also, best of luck with what’s happening in your personal life.

Fran: I know, crazy.

Interviewer: I’m sure it will be terrifying and amazing, so, just good luck with that.

Fran: Thanks. Thank you very much for your time, and the best of luck with the project.

Interviewer: Thank you, so much.

Fran: It’s really thought-provoking and I think it’ll be wonderful research.

Interviewer: Thank you, so much.

Fran: Thank you for doing it.

Interviewer: Cheers, okay, bye

END AUDIO

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