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START AUDIO

[0:00:16]

Interviewer: So, before I get started with my questions, is there anything about the booklet that you want to ask about, or any comments on that?

Sophia: I love the poem at the back. I really like that. It’s very sweet.

Interviewer: Can you relate to that? Does it seem about right?

Sophia: I think so. I think it seems pretty right. Yes, I like that. I also found this really interesting. The different characteristics about a person, some of those are quite accurate. Yes, a lot of the stuff on there.

Interviewer: Yes, and obviously we’ve gotten them from just two weeks of you sending us links.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: So, yes, these… You’re interested in entertainment, slash, open brackets, Harry Potter.

Sophia: Yes. (Laughter) That’s pretty accurate. That was just getting sent news stories and stuff about the new series from my friend and looking into that a lot on a couple of days. That’s probably where that came from.

Interviewer: Yes, great. Okay, well, we’ll leave the stuff on the back for now and then I’m going to just ask you some questions. Some have nothing to do with this. Some kind of refer to it. If you’re happy to get started, we’ll just get going. Let me just check I’m recording everywhere. Yes, okay, so the first thing I want to draw your attention to is on page four, which is the frequency times of day chart.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: First of all, do you think that’s about right in terms of when you read things? Because you didn’t necessarily share stuff with us as you read them. We can’t know that for sure. So, first of all, yes, does that look about right, about the times when you would read online news and information? If that is so, could you just try and talk me through that as a typical day, in terms of how you’re reading at the different times, what’s going on, around, etc?

Sophia: Yes. I’d say it’s pretty accurate that I mostly look at stuff in the morning. It’s more when I get to work, or on my way to work and I can’t really be bothered doing much for the first half an hour, or an hour, but I want to feel like I’m being productive. I look at the news, I look at Twitter, I look at what’s going on. Yes, that’s where it mostly comes from. Or on my commute, if I’m walking and I just want something to look at, I’ll flip through my phone. I’ll go on BBC News, go on Twitter and see what’s going on.

Interviewer: Then what about the rest of the day? There are equal amounts noon, afternoon.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: A little bit in the evening, a tiny bit at night.

Sophia: Noon or afternoon, could be like- Noon is- Particularly after lunch, if I’m- the same reason, not really into starting work yet, but wanting to have a look at something, I see what’s happened throughout the day. I have a bit of a catch-up. Afternoon, sometimes I’m doing Twitter content for work and when I’m on Twitter anyway, I’m looking at what else is going on there.

Or if I’m working from home, I’ll be watching TV or something in the afternoon/evening, whilst I’m working, or after. If I see something on TV that has happened, I might go on the news and relate to it. So, I was watching a documentary about a tsunami or something, and I was like, “Oh, I’ll look on the news to see if something has happened recently to do with that.” That’s kind of where it relates and comes from, so I’ll search for it.

Interviewer: Okay, so on all of those occasions you’ve mentioned, what device are you using?

Sophia: So, it’s either my phone or my work laptop, depending on where I am.

Interviewer: When you say you’re looking at news, are you- For example, do you have apps on your phone to news websites? Or is it going through social media, or internet browser?

Sophia: So, I don’t have particular apps, but I have websites that I like to go to. So, I usually check BBC, then I like local news so I look at Manchester Evening News for Manchester. Sometimes the one up here, the Chronicle one, I have a look on there. Then Twitter, I look for news. I go to social media quite a lot. I’ll just scroll through there and see what’s coming up, or I’ll look on the trending, see what’s trending and look at news related to that.

But if I’m looking for a new story in particular, I’ll just go on any website. I don’t really care. I just want to know what’s going on. So, I’ll just pick whatever’s coming up.

Interviewer: Will you do that through a search engine?

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Great. So, have you noticed any changes to the patterns, trends and the way you consume news over time?

Sophia: I think particularly because- Since I’ve got my job now in sustainability, I’m becoming a lot more aware of climate news and things like that. I’m more looking for that side of it. I don’t know if there’s more of it, or it’s just that I’m looking for it, to be honest. I don’t know why, but the news does feel very depressing at the moment, but I don’t know if that’s just general. If I’m just seeing it more, like I’m looking for it.

You know when you get on a train of thought, you see something depressing and you want to know more about it, and you just go down that thing and you want to regularly update yourself on what’s going on. I think that has happened quite a lot.

Interviewer: You’ll do that by… So, like you say, you’ve got a topic about some kind of climate issue, how would that typically go? Would you- You’d search in a search engine and get a story from a news provider, and then what might you do? Would you search for that on social media? Would you just research the internet for more information?

Sophia: So, I’ll either go one of two ways. I’ll either be on the BBC website, press the little, ‘Climate…’ There’s a little category. I’ll see a news story from there and then I’ll look on Twitter and see if someone has talked about it, or I’ll search the rest of the internet to see if anyone else has talked about it, then look more towards that.

Or it could be the other way that I’ll be on Twitter and see someone talk about it. Then I’ll search in the news. ‘Have they just made this up on Twitter, or is this a genuine thing going on?’

Interviewer: Okay, and do you typically read headlines, summaries, whole articles? How much time do you spend reading individual articles? How does that pattern look?

Sophia: To be honest, it just depends how interested I am in it. If it’s something I’m quite interested in, I’m quite happy to read something longer. If it’s something I just want to know what’s going on, like that’s it, that’s a headline, that’s it, I’ll just look at that. Particularly with Twitter, I quite like to read a bit more, because people like to pick out bits to draw you in, but when you actually read into it, it’s not as scary as it first looks.

Interviewer: Right, so, on that idea of things that interest you, we’ve got some blue circles on the next page with what we’ve inferred are your main interests.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: So, why do you think you are drawn to these topics and issues?

Sophia: In terms of the climate change thing, disasters, natural things like that, I think that all comes from my job and my own interests. I’m just very interested in sustainability and climate change. So, that strongly comes from that. In terms of the entertainment one, that’s just something I like. I have friends who like it that send me articles, or I’ll send them articles and we’ll talk about it. So, that’s where my research comes- Why I’m looking towards that.

In terms of healthcare, I have a lot of friends who are doctors. I’m thinking about doing some counsellor training and going into healthcare ways at some point, so I do like to know what’s going on, to keep track of all of that. Politics, it kind of relates to everything. To do with my climate stuff as well, and also just generally what’s going on. I like to know what’s going on. I listen to politics podcasts and stuff, so [ \_\_\_ 0:09:30] [to them].

Interviewer: Okay. So, you mentioned sometimes on- I think you said social media, but [I’ll] say you meant Twitter. Correct me if I’m wrong. Sometimes you said they pick out a part of a story, but that can be… You maybe need to read it all to find out it’s not as bad as it seems, or whatever. How often do you think you do encounter news that is either misleading or fake?

Sophia: I don’t know necessarily fake, but misleading, a lot. You know on your iPhone, it comes up with news notifications? I don’t know how you stop them, but random- Like Sky News, something has happened [in Ukraine 0:10:19], and you actually press on it and it has been completely blown out of proportion. There are certain websites where they’ll do it more. So, BBC is usually quite good in that they don’t do it as much, but the Mirror, or Sky News, or something like that will blow stuff out of proportion ridiculously. I have to read it and make sure.

I’m quite an anxious person and seeing stuff does make me more anxious, so I’m very led to read things to make sure and keep track of things. But an example on Twitter was a couple of weeks ago there was something like, ‘The world is going to hit 1.5 degrees of warming,’ which is a limit, which is quite scary. Then you press it and then it’s like, ‘Oh, but it’s due to a phenomenon. This could only happen in a couple of years.’ It’s like they’ve drawn you in with that headline, but really you have to read more into it. That kind of stuff.

Interviewer: We’ll come back to that idea, I think, in a moment. You’ve referred to this a little bit, but what sort of thing would prompt you to want to check the accuracy of something you read online? If it scares you?

Sophia: Yes, pretty much. If I’m scared, then I’ll press it to try and unscare [sic] myself. Or if I read something scary just generally, I’ll try to find something else to try and reason with it. I’ll try to see who has written it and think to myself, “Okay, are they writing this just to bait you in? Or should I genuinely be scared?” Then sometimes I’ll go and look if some research or something has written something, to try and compare it. But, yes, generally if it scares me, that’s when I want to know more.

Interviewer: You mentioned a couple of what I would call methods for verifying. So, you said you might look for research on the subject. Or you might find another thing. So, yes, just focusing on that idea of verifying things you read online, what other kinds of methods- Could you talk about those methods a bit more, of how you verify information?

Sophia: So, if there’s one news website that’s posting something, I’ll usually check a couple of others to see if they’ve reposted it. So, if I saw it on the Sun or something like that, I’m usually quite like, “They’re the only one who has posted it. It’s probably going to be a bit rubbish. So, I’m going to ignore it.” But if the BBC have posted it, I’m more inclined to trust it and I’ll see who else has done something similar.

I’m thinking what else. Maybe I’ll look at stuff like advice or things like that. Some other random sites that are a bit different, because they sometimes have a different alternative on stuff like that. Or I’ll chat to people at work for certain things, or friends, and see what they think. I don’t know if that’s the best way of verifying something, but… (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes. I just think, yes, because I guess people have loads of different ways at different times- I was just trying to get you to think of the different ways you might verify things.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Obviously, it will be different for different types of information. Again, this might depend on the type of news, but if you could try and talk about, where do you go first to double-check something you’ve read online?

Sophia: If I read something, I’ll put it into Google and I’ll see who else has written the same thing. If no-one else wrote the same thing, I’m genuinely thinking, “It’s not super-important.” But if everyone’s reporting on the same thing, then I’m like, “Maybe I should look into this a bit more,” and I’ll check a couple of different news websites and see if they’ve all written the same thing.

If they’ve all written the same thing, I’m like, “Okay, maybe there’s something going on here,” and I’ll believe it. If it’s something that scares me, I’ll try to find something to rationalise it.

Interviewer: So, you’ll read something that you maybe encounter through Twitter, via a news source, then you’ll leave Twitter, go onto search engine, Google, type in whatever, some keyword from that or some words, and just see if other people are talking about it.

Sophia: Yes, and if- I don’t know. Sometimes, I’ll research the person who said something and see if there’s anything controversial about them.

Interviewer: So, would this be the person as in- If it’s a BBC article, you’ll look at that journalist. Or are you talking about just individuals posting on social media as themselves, rather than an organisation?

Sophia: Not even that. It’s like, say the transport secretary said something, I will research them. So, for journalists writing about somebody, I will research that person they’re writing about and see if there’s anything from that.

Interviewer: Okay, we’ll come back to that idea of sources, I think, in a moment. So, I’m trying to think at this point of the questions around the way you respond to and react to things you read online.

Sophia: Okay.

Interviewer: So, have you ever made a decision or taken an action based on something you’ve read in an online news article?

Sophia: I’ve spoken to people about it. I message it to my friends and be like, ‘Look at this. It’s a bit scary.’ I don’t think I’ve particularly changed things. It has made me think more about different things. It makes you a bit scared. I’m very anxious, so it has just made me more anxious quite a lot and overthinking things, I think. But I’ve not directly changed what I’ve done, I don’t think.

Interviewer: That’s good for sustainability [in a way 0:16:50].

Sophia: Yes, the lights going off.

Interviewer: Okay, so you talked about sometimes your friends sending you articles, sometimes you sharing things. Can you talk about the ways that you do share online news and stuff?

Sophia: So, if I’m on my work laptop and I think one of my colleagues, or one of my friends who also works at the uni will like it, I send it through Teams. I just pop the link in Teams and be like, ‘Look at this thing. What do you think about it?’ If I’m on my phone at home, I’ll put it- I’ll just send it through Messenger or Snapchat or whatever they use, but I don’t directly use Twitter to send it to people. Because the only account I have is my work Twitter and I don’t want to message people through that.

Interviewer: So, you use end-to-end messaging services.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Or Teams at work. What kinds of factors do you consider before deciding to share something?

Sophia: Will they find it interesting? How will they think about me sending it, if that makes sense? [Is it 0:18:05] something completely odd? Because they’ll think, “She’s a weirdo. Why is she sending me this?” (Laughter) Even though I find it quite interesting to read. But something like that. Yes, I guess that’s the main thing. If it’s something climate related, it’ll be kind of related to work. So, I don’t mind sending it to certain people and being like, “Look what’s going on. Shall we talk about this?” That kind of stuff.

Interviewer: So, something that might prompt further discussion.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: With people at work, you might share something and you also… You mentioned you might not share certain things that you find interesting.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Because you’re worried about what other people might think about that. So, could you maybe give an example, even if it’s not a clear one, just an example of what that kind of thing might be?

Sophia: So, I do a lot of- Like a doomscrolling situation, where I’ll look into something and get obsessed to the fact that I need to know what’s going on all the time. So, I don’t know if you’ve seen on BBC, they have a tracking thing, where there’ll be a journalist posting every couple of minutes about what a situation is and what’s going on. That kind of stuff. So, I’ll see something like that about what’s happening in Ukraine and I’ll get obsessed to the fact that I keep this open on my laptop all day and watch what’s going on.

I’m not going to tell anyone else about that, because it’s a little bit weird. It’s a bit like, “Why is she looking at this?” But mentally, I need to know what’s going on, even though it doesn’t impact me, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yes, totally. Have you ever shared something either on WhatsApp, or Messenger, or Snapchat, or anything, that later turned out to be fake?

Sophia: I’m trying to think if I have. I don’t think so. Oh, maybe something about a TV series starting up or something like that, and it’s just not. You get these rumours of like, “Oh, look, the new season is coming out,” and it’s not coming out. Something like that. Nothing particularly major, I don’t think.

Interviewer: So, do you think that you do- Before you would share something, do you think you would do any kind of fact-checking yourself before you share something?

Sophia: Kind of, yes. I usually think about something quite a lot before I’d send it on to someone else. Unless it’s just something funny, then I’m not that bothered. But then I would only send that to certain people who I know would find it funny.

Interviewer: So, what kind of fact-checking might you do before you shared something? I suppose the fact that you’re talking about sharing stuff about sustainability is a really interesting example to talk about these things. So, what sort of fact-check- If there was some kind of news story around something to do with the climate sustainability, what sort of fact-checking would you do before you would send that to colleagues?

Sophia: The main thing would be, where’s it from? So, if it’s from somewhere we trust, then I’m more inclined to send that. I’d read the article and make sure I know what’s in the article before I’m sending something that could be rubbish. It’s got a clickbait headline, kind of thing. I’d say those are my main two things, yes.

Interviewer: Yes. So, the source is a big thing.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: But you’d always read the whole thing before you would send it as well.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you ever changed your mind about an issue or a person, to a certain extent, based on something you’ve read online?

Sophia: Not really. Not that I can think of particularly. I think I’ve always… Nothing I look at is particularly person-centred, yes.

Interviewer: You haven’t changed your mind about an issue? Maybe not completely changed your mind, but been influenced in the way you think about something, based on something you’ve read online?

Sophia: Yes, I think I’ve read stuff like- I remember reading something about mental health. The way that women’s health- So, I looked at articles to do with that and you think, “Oh, I never thought about something that way.” That has changed things. Usually, if something really interesting like that comes up, I’ll send it to my friend. There’s something I’d definitely share.

Interviewer: So, if it’s something enough to make you change the way you think, that would be one of the factors you’d think about, “This is worth sharing.”

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Great. You also mentioned not just sharing articles with friends and family, but also discussing things. So, could you talk about when you have discussions with friends of family about stuff you read online, how do they typically play out?

Sophia: It’s mostly that… It can be a friend reassuring me that I’ve overreacted to things. (Laughter) Sometimes it’s that. Sometimes it’s just like, “Oh, this is a really depressing world we live in, isn’t it?” A bit of a doom chat of, “Oh, this is really sad. Oh, look at that other thing that’s really sad.” That kind of thing. The same with work. Most climate news is pretty depressing, (Laughter) so just pretty depressing chats, to be honest.

Interviewer: But you would normally, I guess, bring up, “Has anyone else read this thing? What do people think about it?” So, try and get a discussion.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Not try and get one, but you’d bring up stuff with the… Thinking that this will become a discussion point.

Sophia: Yes, I’d be like, “Oh, I saw this thing when I was checking the news. I saw this. Have you seen it? What do you think about it?” That kind of stuff.

Interviewer: Yes, so those sorts of questions, you would say, “Have you read it? What do you think about it?” So, you’re trying to get other people’s views on something you’ve read.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Would that always be something maybe you’ve read where you think, “I’m not quite sure what I think, so I’ll speak to other people.” Or is it also you going, “This thing really backs up the way I think about something, so I’m going to say, ‘Hey, look at this,’”?

Sophia: Yes. Certain topics- I’ll choose topics for certain people as to what I’m going to talk about. Because I know certain topics will go down better with certain people than others, [if that makes sense 0:25:21]. (Laughter) Yes, so I’ll focus- Say I’m talking climate stuff, I’ll talk more with work people. With mental health stuff, I talk with my friend. Any religion stuff- So, I’m Jewish. If I see anything to do with Israel or things like that, which could be religion-centred, I’ll send it to my Jewish friends. It just depends who I’m talking to.

Interviewer: Is there any reason why you wouldn’t talk about climate issues with your friends? Or share climate stories with your friends? Or talk about them, we’re talking about?

Sophia: Sometimes I do send little bits, but it’s more like… You all have that same understanding at work. This is our job, so they all- That’s what they talk about. Whereas the other stuff with my friends is more my personal side interests as well and stuff that they’ll find more interesting. I don’t think they’re super-interested in climate stuff all the time.

Interviewer: Okay, fair enough. So, the book also indicates some of the sources you seem to have shared more from than others. Do you think you tend to rely on certain news sources more than others? Has this changed at all over time?

Sophia: Definitely. I definitely look at BBC more than anything else. I don’t know why a part of me has always felt like it was reliable. I don’t think I look at too much different stuff outside of that. I’ve got MSN on there, that’s just because when you open Bing on your laptop, it sometimes comes up with new stories on there. I’ll look at those and I usually think, “Oh, they’re a little bit rubbish, a lot of them,” but they usually link to other sites that I’ll look at as well. But definitely- I don’t know why I’ve always had that trust in BBC stuff.

Interviewer: Yes. We’ve got a percentage on page five of news versus social media. For a lot of people, the social media one is higher than the news one.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Yours is significantly lower, although still 20-odd%. So, how do you feel about the role of social media in disseminating news and information?

Sophia: It is useful. I do see stuff on Twitter that I wouldn’t have found otherwise. I don’t really use Instagram much, but if I am on there, sometimes I’ll see bits on there. But personally, for me, I find it more reliable to go onto a news site and see that stuff. I’m looking for it. That’s my- “Okay, I’m going to read the news now.” Whereas sometimes, when I’m on social media, I don’t want to see stuff. I just want to see funny cat videos and stuff. I don’t want to see depressing news things, but maybe that’s just who I follow.

Interviewer: So, you’re talking about it in terms of [when you’re 0:28:51] on news sites, because you’re more in control and you know or you’re expecting more stuff. Whereas, social media you might think of as being somewhere that’s not quite the same. Whether you get something from social media, or from a news site directly, how does that affect the way you trust something, if at all?

Sophia: I’d definitely trust something more on a news site than on social media, but a lot of social media links to the news site anyway. They just have the link to the article. But if someone doesn’t give a link and they just said, ‘Oh, did you know this fact,’ then I’m not really going to believe it unless someone gives me a proper source for it.

Interviewer: Okay. So, yes, you… So, in terms of- Just to go back to that question, not that you didn’t answer it, but just based on what you said… So, do you think social media has a role in disseminating news and information?

Sophia: Definitely. I think… Not for me personally, but a lot of my friends will use a lot of TikTok and Instagram, and most of their news comes from that. They’ll be like, “Oh, did you see this thing? I saw on TikTok that this thing is happening.” They get most of their stuff from there. I personally don’t like looking at stuff like that, but I do fully see it as the way a lot of people just get their news now. They won’t look for it on a news site. It’ll just come up on their feed.

Interviewer: Do you think what you do is more old-fashioned?

Sophia: Yes, I think it kind of comes across like that.

Interviewer: But do you think there’s a difference? Do you think where people mainly get information from TikTok or mainly from a news site, do you think there’s a difference in the news they’re getting? Is one- Yes, what’s the difference?

Sophia: I think- I know TikTok uses an algorithm and stuff, so you’re not really in control of what videos come up on your feeds. If you’re scrolling and you see a video about some news thing going on, that’s what you’re given. Whereas on the news site, you’ll have loads of different articles and you press what you want to see. Whereas TikTok, you’re just given a video and you watch it, kind of stuff.

Interviewer: So, do you think it will affect the…? How does it- You kind of touched on it a bit, but how does that affect the type of information people are exposed to? Is everyone still exposed to the same at the end of the day? Or do you think there’s a difference?

Sophia: Probably pretty different. I think a lot of the news my friend sees- She’ll tell me loads of celebrity news and stuff like that, that comes up on her feed. So, I don’t see any of that, because I don’t look for it. But you didn’t really look for it either, but you just got it all up because you look at a lot of make-up, a lot of hair and a lot of clothes things. So, TikTok will automatically give you videos about celebrities who are into all that kind of stuff, so you know all of that kind of stuff without even asking for it. Whereas I’ll look for news. To go to sites to look for it is a bit different.

Interviewer: I suppose if you decided you just wanted to get all your news from TikTok and you only looked at stories about sustainability and climate, you might still avoid the celebrity news.

Sophia: Probably, yes. But then you don’t know who’s making these videos on TikTok as well. It can be a little bit iffy with that. Obviously, official sites do have TikTok, but most of the news a lot of people get is not- It’s just some teenager sat in their room being like, “Did you see what’s coming on this news story?” kind of stuff.

Interviewer: Great. So, you’ve indicated this, but I’ll just ask it as a question anyway. How important do you think it is that news comes from a trusted source?

Sophia: For me, it’s really important. Especially because I get really anxious about stuff and I want to know what I’m reading is the truth, because it’s just going to cause me unnecessary anxiety if it’s not, pretty much.

Interviewer: Okay. So, the second part of that is, how do you determine if something is a trustworthy source?

Sophia: So, if I recognise the name, that seems a bit more trustworthy. If it’s an official government news stuff, that seems more trustworthy. Yes, I’d say those are the main ones. If I don’t really know who they are, I’ve searched them and they’re just an influencer, then I’m not going to believe them.

Interviewer: Okay. So, in terms of the factors that you would consider when determining if something is trustworthy, the source is a main one. What about other things? How does the platform, the subject matter, the person who shared it- Would any of these things matter, or is it all just about the source?

Sophia: It feels more trustworthy and official to me if I’ve gone on the news site and I see the news there, rather than someone talking about it on Twitter. It feels more official. Or if I see on Instagram someone posts something about a news story and they don’t source it, then I’m like, “I don’t really trust that.” So, [if 0:34:42] it looks more official online, I’m more likely to trust it. Also, if they quote stats and stuff in it, if they say where they got it all from, that makes it more trustworthy.

Interviewer: So, being transparent about the sources.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: They wouldn’t necessarily need a link to a National Geographic or BBC, but if they were transparent about their sources, that would make a big difference.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Have you ever stopped following a news source or relying on one because you stopped trusting it?

Sophia: So, I used to watch Sky News and stuff like that when I was younger a lot. All the time. Because that’s what my parents watched. Then when I actually started looking at it online, I’m like, “I don’t think I trust this as much as what’s coming on.” So, I just don’t look at that as much anymore.

Interviewer: Okay, interesting. So, you watched Sky News on TV.

Sophia: A bit of a random one, but I don’t know why that feels slightly untrustworthy. I don’t know why. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Yes, but when you started accessing it online, you trusted it less.

Sophia: It just felt very clickbaity [sic]. I don’t know, but I think it was those Apple News notifications. A lot of them came from Sky News and a lot of them were very clickbait kind of things. It just really put me off. I just really didn’t want to see anything like that anymore.

Interviewer: Do you think that if you clicked on the clickbait headline, you would probably just read the same story as you would’ve found it and found it more trustworthy if you’d just found the story?

Sophia: Probably, yes. But it’s the fact that it pops up on my phone that I don’t want to look at it now.

Interviewer: Yes, I guess that’s what I’m trying to get at. So, there’s something about the way something is presented as a headline, or whatever, that makes you lose trust.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: The fact that it pops up on your phone as opposed to something else, you think that’s a big factor.

Sophia: Yes, massive. If it’s on my phone, I don’t want to look at it, because it’s just that they want me to read it, pretty much. (Laughter) I don’t know. I feel that’s a bit of a weird thing to say, but…

Interviewer: No, it’s not. It makes sense. I’m just… The reason I’m asking further questions sometimes is just so I don’t make these assumptions about, “Okay, this is this.”

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: So, has your trust in news and information sources been affected at all by recent events? So, such as becoming aware of disinformation campaigns, fake news. Do you think these things have affected your trust in online news?

Sophia: It has definitely got me thinking about it more. I don’t know if it- It has made me want to check things in multiple sources, instead of straight looking at one thing. Because it makes it seem more trustworthy to me if it’s in multiple places. But, yes, it has definitely made me think about it more.

Interviewer: What about the development of new technologies? So, deepfakes. The fake videos and AI generated content. Have those things affected your trust in the online news?

Sophia: Not at the moment, but it does terrify me and I fully think it will. (Laughter)

Interviewer: What about- I guess a slightly different trust. Do you think it has affected your ability to…? Because I think separate from trust, you’ve talked about how you have this way of verifying online things. Do you think the rise of these technologies will affect your ability to verify the truthfulness of something?

Sophia: Definitely. I think it’ll make it harder to see if something is true, because multiple people will believe the same source, kind of thing. It will make it harder. I think for now, it doesn’t feel like it’s developed enough. Maybe it is and I don’t know about it. But for me, it doesn’t feel like it’s far enough in yet that it’s going to impact things. But I could definitely see in a couple of years’ time going further and impacting what I see.

Interviewer: So, you think now you could tell the difference between something that’s fake or AI generated versus something that’s authentic?

Sophia: I’d like to think so. I’d hope. To be honest, I don’t know, but I’d like to think I could.

Interviewer: Okay. You’ve talked about the difference between having things pushed to you on your phone versus you looking for them and being more active. So, I think I’ve got a few questions around that kind of thing. So, in general, how comfortable are you with the personalisation of newsfeeds through algorithms and suchlike?

Sophia: I really don’t like it. I hate it, because they know what scares me and they are giving me stuff to carry on scaring me, so I’ll read more stuff. So, I really don’t like it personally.

Interviewer: Have you ever been concerned about your personal data and information, in terms of using the news sites and the social media sites?

Sophia: Yes, but on my own mental wellbeing. So, you know on Apple how it used to give you news stories that it recommends for you? Like if you slide all the way to the left.

Interviewer: Yes.

Sophia: I deleted that off my phone, because it was just a constant reminder of things that scared me. So, I ended up having to delete it because it did that. So, yes.

Interviewer: So, it’s more about the effect on your wellbeing, rather than a concern about the use of your personal data.

Sophia: Yes. To be honest, I’m pretty sure they have all the data about me. They have plenty. I don’t really care about that, to be honest. I’m more bothered about myself and how I feel than what they’re going to do with some data about me.

Interviewer: Well, what they’re doing with the data is saying, “Read these things that you don’t want to read,” I suppose.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: So, you know when you go on websites and then you get a pop-up about cookies?

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: What’s your feeling about that? What do you generally do? How do you feel about that sort of stuff?

Sophia: I always press, ‘No,’ or try to find a way to press, ‘No,’ and if it won’t let me press, ‘No,’ I’ll go off it. Because I know if you’re asking me that then you’re looking for something, I don’t want it to track what I’m doing.

Interviewer: So, you’ll always select to not allow them and if you can’t find out how to do that, you will just leave the site.

Sophia: Yes, and I’ll always use incognito on my phone. If I’m searching at work, a lot of the time I do as well, just so it doesn’t look at it.

Interviewer: So, you’ve talked about one effect of personalised newsfeeds for yourself, but I wonder if you’ve got any other thoughts or reflections on, what do you think are the impacts of people being exposed to news generated by personalised automated newsfeeds?

Sophia: I think it lets you avoid things. I think it could only show you what you want to see and then you’ll avoid certain news sites, or just complete topics in general. You might- If you’re not interested in politics and you don’t look at politics sites regularly and it gathers that, then it won’t give you anything. You might miss massive things going on and you don’t know about it.

Interviewer: Just to take that back to what you were saying about deleting that app or newsfeed from your phone and stuff… So, you’re kind of saying that you felt you had little control over that and it was showing you things you didn’t want to see. But on the other hand, you’re saying the problem with it is you only see what you want to see. So, can you reconcile those two…?

Sophia: Yes. I guess when I go on a news website, you see everything. Even though I don’t particularly want to look at certain things and I won’t read into it, I’ll still see a headline about it and I’ll still know it’s going on. Whereas, in a personalised newsfeed, I won’t see that headline at all. So, I still want to know something’s happening, even if I don’t want to read about it. I just need to know it’s there.

Interviewer: So, if you want to… The personalised newsfeed responds to what you like. Do you not feel you could have kept your Apple News, but just taught it what you liked? Or do you think it’s not quite as simple as that?

Sophia: But what I like is to look at scary things and I didn’t want to look at more scary things. (Laughter) That sounds really-

Interviewer: So, it knew you too well.

Sophia: Yes, that was the problem. It was showing me stuff that I didn’t want to see and I just didn’t want to see that constantly.

Interviewer: Okay. So, do you feel you trained it too well, so the only option was to ignore it altogether?

Sophia: Get rid of it, yes. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay. So, so far, you’ve given this impression of checking things you read, thinking about the source and things like that. You’ve also talked about clickbait, in terms of your relationship to Sky News, for example. But just as a straight question, how do you feel about the level of objectivity in online news?

Sophia: What do you mean by objectivity?

Interviewer: You would be objective, like, “Here are the facts, the truth,” and not subjective or maybe more comment or based… Yes.

Sophia: I feel like most online sites- If you go to a news website, like BBC or something like that, they’re quite objective. It’s not much comment. Unless you go to an opinion piece. They’ll usually quite clearly say, “This is an opinion.” Whereas, on Twitter, it’s usually people’s opinions. They don’t say it’s their opinions, but it is their opinions. I quite like to have that distinguish of, “This is an opinion piece. This is what I think,” and, “This is fact.” I like having that.

Interviewer: Do you think there’s a reassurance in labelling the difference between objective and not, on the BBC website, for example?

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think that’s true of other news websites that are online versus social media?

Sophia: I think some of them do. Some of them don’t. Very clearly don’t. So, the Mirror, the Sun, things like that, usually will just mess it all up together and that confuses me. I don’t particularly like it. But some of the more- Like the Guardian will usually say if it’s an opinion or not, so I’m more likely to trust that.

Interviewer: Do you think the Guardian is as objective as the BBC?

Sophia: I’d say the BBC is more, but the Guardian’s not bad. So, I’d more- I would read something from there.

Interviewer: Fair enough. On that note, do you think that the BBC as the state broadcaster- So, you understand they’re funded in a different way to everyone else.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think you trust them more? Do you think you trust something that’s publicly state funded versus something that’s funded by advertisers or other means?

Sophia: A lot more, yes, because you know there’s less of one person making all those decisions. Like a CEO who has some political views that are pushing it one way. However, there was a point in the recent weeks, I don’t know how long ago it was, that the BBC blocked a climate thing going out. It was one of David Attenborough’s episodes of something. They didn’t show it because it was too politically controversial, because it talked about the climate. That got me thinking a bit. “Are they blocking things? What’s going on?” That made me rethink things a little bit.

Interviewer: So, do you think that the BBC as a state broadcaster should be subject to different regulations and different standards to broadcasters and media outlets funded by other means?

Sophia: Yes, I think it should be the place you go for trustworthy things. It’s why I trust it the most, I think, because I know that it’s not someone’s political view most of the time. Or I believe that. I don’t know how true that is. But, yes, I think it should be scrutinised a lot more.

Interviewer: What steps do you think that news sources online, including all the ones we talked about, what steps do you think they can take to maintain their trustworthiness and credibility in this climate of distrust in the media, clickbait headlines etc? What sorts of things do you think they can do to maintain credibility and trustworthiness?

Sophia: Be really transparent. Say where you’re getting data from. Say who’s saying this, different things. I know it reads well, but don’t put really scary things in your headlines that will just make people click on it and then later disprove it in your article. Just be pretty straight-up from the start about what’s going on. I know that’s not great news. It doesn’t get people to press it and they just want people to read it, but I find it more trustworthy if you do something like that.

Interviewer: Yes. I think I’ll pick up on that point, because I think it’s an interesting point that you’re saying it’s less… You understand why they have these clickbait headlines, because it’ll become more…

Sophia: They want people to read it.

Interviewer: They want people to read it.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: But that makes them less trustworthy.

Sophia: It feels like that, yes. I’m less likely to read it if it has got something like that.

Interviewer: Less likely to read it, or… Are you more likely then to ignore something that you think is clickbait, or do you think for you, or do you think for some people, they’re more likely to- Even though it’s clickbait and you don’t like that, do you think at least it gets people to click on it and read it? Or do you think there are other outcomes of the sensationalist headlines?

Sophia: I do think it gets people to read it. Maybe I’m just worried that it puts me off, but I think it does get more people to read it. I guess you just have to be really careful what you put in that headline, to make sure it’s not… I think what puts me off is, if you’re putting headlines of scary things constantly, I don’t want to be scared again. I don’t want to carry on making myself more anxious about what’s going on, so I won’t read it.

But if you’re very honest in a headline and pick things that are less frightening, I guess, I’m less likely to read it. But I know that doesn’t always work for people. I know people are like, “That’s scary. I need to know what’s going on. I want to read it.”

Interviewer: Do you think that…? What are the other kinds of issues and concerns around this clickbait thing, as you see it? So, for you personally, you’ve explained that. But you also said, “Maybe some people will click on it, because they’ll think, ‘Oh, I must find out more.’” But do you think there are any other consequences or impacts of that way of presenting news and information?

Sophia: I think sometimes people won’t even read it. So, they’ll see that headline and that’s it. Then you run that risk of people believing just what’s said there and not looking into it more. It can lead to misunderstanding and not really understanding what’s going on. So, if the headline is, ‘She said this…” and you actually read the article and it’s in a context, you understand- You’re more likely to understand what’s going on.

But if you only saw, ‘She said that…” you’re going to think she’s a bad person. You’re going to believe that. I think a lot of people don’t read into things, they just look at the headline of stuff.

Interviewer: So, what would be your…? If we’re going to [say 0:54:16], yes, some people are going to get most of their information from social media and there are going to be these kinds of headlines etc., what would be your rules or advice for people to not be misled and stuff online? What would you- I guess you can think of that as advice, or just think about, what would you do? What do you actually do, etc? What do you say would be the rules for encountering online information?

Sophia: I’d say to the person writing stuff, “Don’t put something in a headline that if someone only reads the headline, they’re going to get misinformed.” Like, what someone’s saying. Give a fact. If they don’t give information in the headline, if that’s all someone reads, they’re going to get the wrong idea. So, I think that’s really important on that side.

In terms of people looking at stuff, just make sure to read things property of what’s going on. If you see a clickbait headline, to actually read it. Even though I know that’s not always possible, because there are hundreds of different things that come up and you can’t read everything. But if there is something in particular that’s interesting, make sure to check it. Or that seems really out there.

Interviewer: Right. I just want to go back to your book for now. So, there are the three graphs there. So, there’s the medium, the methods and your responses. So, we’ve already talked about social media versus the news and you’ve talked a little bit about the methods. So, you said that you search for things more than just encounter things by scrolling. So, the third one is then the responses.

Okay, so, they look quite- The majority of the time, you say you do nothing. But actually that’s lower than some people’s. Some people’s are much, much higher, the time they do nothing. So, 24% of the time in that two-week period you said you discussed things in real-life, things you’ve read online. Do you think that number, that you could extrapolate that out of the two weeks and that’s a rough number of what you do all the time?

Sophia: Probably, yes. I like to talk about things that I see. So, yes, I’d say that’s quite accurate. Especially because I’m picking what I read and I see. It’s usually what’s interesting to me, so I’ll want to talk about it.

Interviewer: Then the other graph I wanted to pick up on is the trust familiarity.

Sophia: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: So, I would say my analysis of this, and you correct me if I’m wrong, is a lot of the stuff you sent us was from sources you were familiar with, but you didn’t trust them all equally.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: So, you’ve got a bar which is high on familiarity, but spread right across the top. Rather than a correlation. So, can you try and talk me through how you might have ended up with a graph like that?

Sophia: So, it’s probably largely from where I’ve been on a news website, I’ve seen something and I want to look at it in other places. I’ve looked in other places and I don’t trust all those other places that I’m looking at. That’s probably where it has come from.

Interviewer: So, it’s probably part of your cross-referencing.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: But you’re familiar. So, you’re going to other places to cross-reference-

Sophia: I sometimes know they’re not super-accurate, but I’ll look at it anyway, just because I want to see if it has come from other places.

Interviewer: Yes?

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Great. So, I think that is it from me and we haven’t been- We’ve only been an hour. So, there’s a bit of time to say, yes, is there anything you think that we should’ve talked about but we haven’t?

Sophia: Not particularly.

Interviewer: Nothing that I should’ve asked but I haven’t.

Sophia: I don’t think so. I think it’s something really interesting though. It has definitely made me think about what I’m looking at differently, yes.

Interviewer: Do you think- What impact did doing the two-week diary have on you? Did you think- How did you think about things differently?

Sophia: It did make me think what I was looking at and when I’m looking at the news. I didn’t really think about how I’d be watching a documentary, then I’ll just look at the news and see if something’s going on. I don’t think about doing that. I just do it.

Interviewer: So, you might’ve expected for your news consumption to be in these little pockets.

Sophia: Yes. I didn’t think I was doing it all the time pretty much. Yes, I’d say that was the main thing. Also, what you’ve mentioned before about deep faking and things like that, I didn’t think about that before. But that’s a new one to add to the list of anxious things. (Laughter)

Interviewer: I don’t think you need to be. I think you’d be pretty good at spotting them.

Sophia: No, but it is something that’s definitely interesting that I haven’t thought about. But it would be something that could become an issue in the future I think more.

Interviewer: Yes, and I think in terms of what you’re interested in, which is the sustainability, I think that’s definitely an issue and a topic where there are definite sides and agendas. I think it’s a key one around other kinds of health issues, where we’re likely to start encountering these kinds of things. I think it’s a prime area for this kind of stuff to play out.

Sophia: I think it’s a very frustrating news thing to look at as well. Because most of it’s negative and you’ll get a lot of people who will talk about it, not on trusted websites and other sites, and they’ll just completely disregard it. You’re like, “This is so frustrating.”

Interviewer: You mentioned as well that a lot of the stuff is terrifying and anxiety inducing. Do you think that, let’s call it a topic, is different to other kinds of topics people might be interested in, in that sense?

Sophia: I think it makes you feel very hopeless, looking at stuff like that. You feel very unable to do anything about it. I think that’s why a lot of people avoid it. I find it very frustrating to look at a lot as well, because you know- “This is so easy. You could just stop getting oil.” There are so many easy things people could do and governments could do, but they’re not doing it. I think that’s very frustrating for people to read.

Interviewer: Do you see much- Because clearly there is a whole agenda around government lobbying everything. Around everyone’s overblown- “It’s not that bad. Let’s keep digging for oil, etc.” Do you encounter that kind of stuff much? I know you know it exists, right.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: But do you actually encounter it much?

Sophia: Little bits. It’s more because I look for stuff that avoids that, that I don’t see much of it. But I do see little bits of it. That’s why that thing of the BBC not airing that episode got me thinking really quite deeply about stuff and about what the agenda is behind that. Yes, you definitely do see bits about it.

Interviewer: So, do you think- You mentioned a concern for you around people understanding these big concerns around sustainability, ecological things etc. Do you think that one of the concerns of that is that people are just ignoring it or not seeing it at all? Or do you think these are real concerns?

Sophia: I think for a lot of people it’s all really depressing and it’s not something that will affect them now. Or they don’t think it will affect them now. Cost-of-living, healthcare, these are all things that will affect you now. Whereas climate feels distant, so a lot of people choose to ignore it and not engage with it.

Interviewer: But I guess thinking in the context of online news, do you think because there are obviously two very- There are two sides to it.

Sophia: Yes.

Interviewer: Two agendas. But also on top of that you’re saying it’s not really an appealing topic for some people, for various reasons. So, do you think in any way the things we’ve been talking about- So, clickbait articles, personalised newsfeeds. Do you think in some way this online news thing, yes, is a problem in particular for climate?

Sophia: Yes, I think it can… If you believe that it’s not a problem and all the news you’re looking at is looking at that it’s not a problem, you’re never going to see the other side of it. I think that happens to people. I’m guilty myself of going on Twitter and searching through climate deniers, just to see what people are saying and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Okay, so you have actively tried to seek out another side.

Sophia: Yes, because I want to know what people are saying. So, it’s definitely something you can find.

Interviewer: But you need to-

Sophia: You’ve got to look for it sometimes, yes.

Interviewer: Great. Well, yes, I think that’s it from me.

Sophia: Cool.

Interviewer: If you’re happy.

Sophia: Yes, thank you.

Interviewer: I shall turn off the red lights.

END AUDIO

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