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START AUDIO

Rachael: So, are you doing a PhD, are you?

Interviewer: No, I finished in 2019. Then I was a postdoc for a while and I'm just about to start a lectureship next month. So, can’t get rid of me.

Rachael: (Laughter).

Interviewer: So, the booklet. First of all, you’ve just had a quick look. So, yeah, I mean, what the booklet is, is it’s basically based on purely that two-week period of stuff you’ve sent us. So what we were able to do by that was just visualise some of the number stuff we got. But we also, based on the titles and summaries that we could extract from the hyperlinks and stuff you went, were able to try and infer things about your personality.

Rachael: Very true, I think.

Interviewer: So obviously that's part of the stuff we're going to talk about today, about how you feel about those things, and mainly about news. Well, not just news, actually. You know, online information. Because I think sometimes, with people, we've ended up debating a bit about, “Well, that’s not news. Is this news? Is this news?” So I think news or information is good. So the first thing I wanted to draw your attention to in your diary is on page four. This one.

Rachael: I've opened it out the wrong way.

Interviewer: So, page four, which is the most frequent time of day you check the news. So the first question is basically, that's obviously when you shared it with us. Yeah, I've got the wrong one up. Yeah, that's when you shared it with us, but does that reflect well, when you think you typically access news and stuff online?

Rachael: Probably, yeah, like, just flicking through my phone, I think, in the afternoon.

Interviewer: If that looks about right, could you talk us through the typical day, so what that might look like, when you access the news, how, where you are, what's going on?

Rachael: So I guess in the early morning, I might have, if I've got time, a flick on my phone, on Twitter or Facebook or TikTok while I'm having my coffee, and then I'll come to work, and sometimes, I guess just have a five-minute breather or whatever in between meetings or whatever, I'll have a flick on my phone again and just to zone out for a little bit. And, again, news stories tend to pop up on those social media platforms that if they take my interest, I'll click on them. In the evening, again, I'll probably be flicking through social media again and clicking on links if they pop up.

What is classed as the afternoon? What timeframe was that? Because I go to bed quite early, but not at, like, five o’clock. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Afternoon was 1:00 until 6:00, and we had noon before that, which you’ve got a little bit.

Rachael: So I think yeah, probably it'll be when I'm travelling home from work on the metro or when I get home or, yeah, as I say, flicking in the afternoon while I'm at work.

Interviewer: Yeah. So that big orange afternoon slot is mostly going to be little bits, but then probably commuting home.

Rachael: Hmmhmm. But most of mine was on the sofa. I think it was during that period, I was working from home quite a lot. So, yeah.

Interviewer: So you’ll have been just taking a coffee break and stuff.

Rachael: Hmmhmm, having a flick.

Interviewer: And you mentioned three social media. Would you do all three of them every time, or would there be certain ones you’d go to at different times of day?

Rachael: TikTok, I normally go on in the evening, I would say, but yeah, in the afternoon as well, but mainly in the evening. And Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, I'll just check in intermittently throughout the day.

Interviewer: And are those things, you have apps on your phone?

Rachael: Yeah.

Interviewer: So in terms of that typical day and you talked about working from home and things like that. I guess one thing is that, if we think of that as your consumption pattern, has that, would you say, changed over a period of time? Can you think of a time when it was different and it's changed over time? Would you read more or less or in a different way?

Rachael: Yeah. Well, I guess I have had TikTok for about a year, maybe longer, and I'm fully addicted to it. (Laughter) But, on there, there's lots of news and information that pops up there, you can't help it with what pops up. Like I said, well, you can help it, it’s what you've been reading and clicking on, that then informs, doesn't it, what comes up next. But I'm finding more and more that BBC News has got a TikTok now, or The Sun, the Daily Mail, ITV, whereas normally I would maybe in the morning when I got to work, I like celebrity news, so open the Daily Mail website on my laptop.

Whereas now I tend to get those articles… I don't tend to do that very much anymore. Sometimes I do if I've got time, but it’s because I've already consumed those articles because they’ve popped up on my TikTok or on Facebook or whatever, or I've seen something on Twitter, rather than me going and reading the full website, which I used to do. So yeah, I think it's more things popping up on social media, whereas I used to read the full website and click on articles there. I do that less frequently now.

Interviewer: So now, do you typically read beyond headlines? Do you read the bits presented? And how they're presented? Do you read full articles still? How much time do you spend reading individual things now?

Rachael: I used to be a right clicker on stuff, like, especially on Facebook, but now I understand a little bit more they try to do headlines to grab your attention and sometimes they are just totally wrong. So I tend not to click on them. Like, for example, there was one, like, Ferne McCann's pregnant and I knew she wasn't because I’d been on her Instagram, and so I didn't click on it because I just thought, like, “Why the…?” things like that annoy me, with the news, when they do headlines like that, it's, like, “Where have they got that from?”

But yeah, I do tend to… if something grabs my attention, I will click on it. So if it's anything to do with the themes that you've pulled out, about crime, or I watched the full Johnny Depp, on TikTok when that was happening, or if there are particular bits of news, then yeah, I'll click on it and read the full article.

Interviewer: So you’d probably say that hasn't changed much, even though you're accessing it through TikTok as opposed to the news websites, you are still, per article, probably spending the same amount of time reading different things?

Rachael: Yeah, I guess so, yeah.

Interviewer: The other bit of that is what factors would decide whether it's something where you might just read the headline or the social media post, or that you would definitely read more? What factors would make that decision for you?

Rachael: I guess if it's of a theme of interest. So I tend to go on social media as a release from the day. So I don’t want to be reading… even reading the news through social media or consuming news through social media, it’s still a release. It's got to be aligned with my interests, I suppose, in that sense. So although politics has come up because I've got a basic interest in politics, I want to know what's going on with government and what have you, I don't delve into particularly… I wouldn't say I'm a political person, do you know what I mean? So, if something seemed really political, I wouldn't click on it.

But if it was a bit of political gossip, I guess, I would be more likely to click on it. Or something like that potentially I thought would affect me or my family. I'm a big consumer of celebrity news, but it's got to be particular celebrities that I'm interested in. So I'd click on them. And yeah, crime and stuff like that's been pulled out. So I tend to, again, if there's been an interesting case or something like that, something like that's been on the news then I'll click on that and read the article as well.

But I can be selective, a bit more selective these days in terms of what I click on. I wouldn’t class myself as a Daily Mail reader, I just find that the easiest website to look at in terms of consuming celebrity news. But then I understand some of the dramas with them, I guess, and not wanting misinformation and stuff like that.

Interviewer: Great. So I'm just going to keep moving through topics. We might come back to stuff, and I just need to make sure I cover everything. And then there's probably things you say that we’ll come back. So, as you've already alluded to, there are some blue circles in your book on page seven. So, you've already said these look about right.

Rachael: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: Why do you think you do gravitate towards these topics in any kind of general way, rather than picking them out one at a time?

Rachael: Yeah. They're just aligned with my interests at the moment. So, for example, I've just had a baby. I'm genuinely interested in who else… anything that will affect my kids, so, pregnancy, childbirth. I've probably clicked on a lot of articles about that. Celebrities. Current affairs. Anything gossip-y. So yeah, all of those types of things.

Interviewer: What kind of stuff isn't there? Are there any news topics that you rather than gravitate to would just ignore altogether and are just not interested at all in for various reasons?

Rachael: As I say, I tend to use the news as a release. So although I'd to know what's going on in the world, things that are really negative. So, you know, things about… Although I am interested, for example, in climate issues, in politics, in all of these serious things, I wouldn't want to focus on them too much because I’m using social media and the news that I consume through social media as a getaway from the day, so a break from work or a break from the kids.

So I don't then want to be reading something like that, “Oh, we’re all going to die in a year's time,” or that type of thing. Like, I would prefer something like that I can then talk to my husband about or my friends about or my family or just aligns with my personal interests.

Interviewer: Great. So you mentioned an article about someone being pregnant and you knew they weren’t. How often do you think you do encounter news or information that you think is either fake or just misleading?

Rachael: Well, all of The Sun headlines when they come up on Facebook, I don't even click on them really anymore. Because you'll click on the comments on Facebook and people comment, “I'm going to save you your time. This is total rubbish,” or whatever. So I purposely try not to click on them anymore. It would depend on who it is, really. Obviously, we had to read on that website how trustworthy some of the links were and things like that. So yeah, you do tend to… I think in my head if it's the BBC or something like that, then I would trust it a little bit more. The Daily Mail.

I find The Sun is the biggest one where they, sort of, skew it. The Chronicle. Even other people say that a lot of what they print isn't necessarily the whole truth, but.

Interviewer: That’s the local Newcastle paper?

Rachael: Yes.

Interviewer: Would you say you encounter these misleading or fake things daily? Quite often?

Rachael: Yeah. Sometimes I’ll say things to my friends, like, “Have you read this?” and they’ll be, like, “Where have you got that from?” and I’ll be, like, “TikTok.” They always say, “Don't believe everything that you read on TikTok.” So, for me, sometimes… I'm saying that, yeah, The Sun and all that, they tell lots of porky pies a lot of the time, just to try to get you to click on the link, but at the same time, yeah, particularly TikTok, I think, if those things pop up, I won’t normally… There was one that comes up all the time, I think it’s called Politics Live or something like that.

I don't know who it is or if they're aligned to one particular party, I've got no idea. I just watch them.

Interviewer: So, what might prompt you to question or check the accuracy of something you read online? What might make you go, “Oh, hang on, wait a minute”?

Rachael: If it's The Sun, definitely I would always check.

Interviewer: So it would be more the source rather than the topic?

Rachael: Yeah, I think so.

Interviewer: So The Sun you mentioned a couple of times, so you might see something on The Sun and you immediately think, “That's from The Sun,” and you're suspicious of it?

Rachael: Yes, just because when they pop up on Facebook, they really try and… the headline, you know. As I say, it was literally, “Ferne McCann is pregnant,” but when they clicked on it, it was that she’d said that she was going to start trying for a baby. So they were trying to grab your attention, obviously. And it’s articles like that all the time. So I now know that that's all they're trying to do, and so I'm not going to click on it because it probably won't be anything important or particularly true.

Interviewer: So once you're prompted to check the accuracy of something. You've mentioned a couple already, I think, but what methods would you use to check the accuracy of something? What things would you do, even if they're just really quick things you do to check something was accurate?

Rachael: So, if it’s about a celebrity, I would check their personal social media platforms, usually their Instagram. Sometimes share it. Sometimes we'll talk about it in my WhatsApp groups, “Have seen this? Do you think it's true?” Or, like, “No, I don't think it is,” or whatever.

Interviewer: You say you talk about it in your WhatsApp group, might you share a link to that article to friends and go, “Has anyone read this? What do you think?”

Rachael: Yeah, so I've got a WhatsApp group with my friends and from time to time people will share articles or I will say, “Have you read this? Like, isn't that awful?” or, “Do you think it's true?” or whatever.

Interviewer: So you would actually use that WhatsApp group as not just look at our shared interests, but you might actually try and get other people's opinion on what do other people think of this?

Rachael: Yeah. Or my dad. (Laughter)

Interviewer: And you also mentioned looking at the comments. So would that work in terms of verifying something?

Rachael: Well, obviously, if you take a Sun article, for example, the people commenting on it are just random people from across the world. But it will usually be, like, “Don't bother reading this, it's a load of rubbish,” or, “I'll sum it up in one sentence for you,” and that type of thing. So those types of things will help sway me towards whether I, again, think it's true or not.

Interviewer: And even if it's worth bothering reading?

Rachael: Clicking on it. Yeah.

Interviewer: Because you mentioned if it's about a celebrity, you might go to their Instagram account, etc. Is there any kind of order in the way you would do those things, do you think, like priority, “I’ll always do that first and then do that and then eventually I would check this”?

Rachael: I’d probably check their Instagram first to see if they’ve posted anything about it themselves or whatever. Potentially, I might check some other news websites. Or nowadays as well, I get things pop up on my phone, so Apple News pops up on my watch and my phone. Twitter as well if it's big things, so it popped up on my watch, “Phillip Schofield steps down from ITV.” That's been a more recent one, but it would be instant. I wouldn't then go and check that. It tends to be when I'm scrolling something catches my eye and I think, “Hmm, I wonder if that's true.”

If it's about a celebrity, I'll check their Instagram. Or if it's a political story, maybe I would check another website to verify, like maybe go onto BBC or something like that, which is a bit more trusted.

Interviewer: Would you do that more often than checking the comments? Because you mentioned checking the comments and sometimes other people have just gone, “This is rubbish.”

Rachael: Yeah, I tend to only read the comments if it's The Sun, before clicking on it and wasting my time. (Laughter)

Interviewer: When you talk about reading The Sun, you mentioned Facebook. Is The Sun something you would probably only encounter on Facebook?

Rachael: On Facebook, yeah.

Interviewer: You don't follow The Sun on…?

Rachael: I don't follow them on Facebook either. It just pops up. It just comes in my newsfeed.

Interviewer: They look for you, do they?

Rachael: Yeah, they must do. (Laughter)

Interviewer: Okay. So you've mentioned where you would go to double-check information if you wanted to check it. So with more political stuff, you said you would check probably other news websites.

Rachael: Yeah, probably the BBC.

Interviewer: Celebrity, you’d go to Instagram, etc. Have you ever used a specific fact-checking website or something like that?

Rachael: No. I wouldn't even know where to find one.

Interviewer: Okay, so are there any other ways? I know we've been talking about it for a while, but can you think of any other ways that you do think, “I need to verify or check this?” You've mentioned a few. Do you think that about covers it?

Rachael: That about covers it, yeah.

Interviewer: Have you ever made a decision or done some kind of action based on something you've read as online news?

Rachael: All the time, probably. (Laughter) Yeah. I know it sounds awful but I’ll decide who… I'm not a nasty person, but I’ll decide who I like, who I don't like, celebrity-wise. Do you know what I mean? Every morning as I'm leaving the house, I'm saying to my mum, “What do you think about the Phillip Schofield thing? Do you think he’s done something to ITV? Do you think ITV have done something to him?” because different things are popping up.

That’s a more recent one because I can’t really remember the ones I referenced in the data diary, but because I'm reading articles, something’s popping up on TikTok, “He’s a paedophile, blah, blah, blah.” Then some things are popping up saying that ITV have done something to him and are trying to keep him quiet. So there are all these different opinions. So I’ll tend to… because my mum’s got an interest in Phillip Schofield, I’ll have a chat with her, “What do you think?”

On the WhatsApp group, we’re having a chat. “What do you think’s happened to him?” So, I'm trying to inform my decision from all these different news articles and my friends and my family to come to my own personal opinion about Phillip Schofield. So that's just one example. I guess, who I’ll vote for, in the recent votes. Loads of decisions, where I might travel, what I might do. It just informs my daily decisions. What I’ll have for my tea? Where I shop. Do you know what I mean? Like, everything.

Interviewer: It’s funny because some people have really pulled back on that question and are, like, “No, of course not.” But then eventually, they do think of things. So, to pick up on that thing, you gave the example of the Phillip Schofield story. So, in case I look back on these in ages and we all forget, he’s been sacked from his job or he’s left his job as the morning presenter on ITV, and there are various rumours going around about him. So, the way you talked about that, you said you would chat to your mother in person about it.

You're in WhatsApp groups. You're seeing stuff on TikTok and different places. Is that a typical process and would you typically just let that process play out?

Rachael: Yeah. Big news stories like that, I do get consumed by them a bit. So, like, the Johnny Depp case, when that was on. Phillip Schofield. We talk about quite a lot, with people at work, “What do you think?” With my mum. Obviously on TikTok especially because I'm talking about it because I'm not searching but reading those articles, watching those videos, more and more stuff is coming up about it. And it’s all different rumours, as you say. Different opinions on what’s what.

So, you know, I've come to a decision in my head what I think has happened, informed by all of those different articles that I've read and discussions I've had with people. And my view is probably slightly different to other people’s, but, yeah, in my head that would be a typical process, I’d want to come to my sort of view on who I… are they the villain? Are they not? That sort of thing. So, yeah.

Interviewer: I think what I was thinking was the way you spoke about that it was a process over days. You keep reading things and new things will come out and new opinions. Whereas some people might be, “I just want to find the truth now. Search, search, search, search until I find the truth.”

Rachael: No. I would read just different… because I don't have time to do that because I've got two kids, I've got a busy life. So I'm on TikTok, “Oh, another video about Phillip Schofield, I’ll watch that,” or, “I’ll read that,” or have a chat with somebody. And that over days will inform my decision, yeah. It’s not like, “I've read that, that’s the truth and that’s what I'm going to believe,” sort of thing.

Interviewer: You talked a bit about opinions online. Let’s just stay with the Phillip Schofield thing because it’s fresh in your head. Are you typically saying people with opinions, so people framing stuff as, “Well, I think this”?

Rachael: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: Or is it people going, in the know, “I know for sure”? Do you take those all in the same way?

Rachael: Yeah. So like, for example, Eamonn Holmes, who's obviously in the know, he's in the media, he's worked with him before, he’s playing him out as a bit of a villain. So I’m believing Eamonn. (Laughter) But then also I'm reading things, like, “Why have ITV kept him for so long? Does he know something about ITV?” Then I was having a bit of a debate with my dad. And he was saying, like, “No, there’ll be a…” I can't remember what he called it, but an agreement where both parties will just keep quiet about it because Phillip Schofield was such a big household name and people wanted to watch him at the time.

So my decisions have been informed, I guess, by trusted people in the media who worked with him, who I don't know, and my dad, who I do know, and I know as well, will have probably went through the same process as me because he uses TikTok, Twitter, all of the same. He will have watched the same videos and stuff like that.

So even the other day, in our WhatsApp group, my friend posted saying, “What's coming up all the time on your TikTok page at the minute? Because mine's people running through what’s in their Marks & Spencer shopping basket,” or something like that. Because it's just weird how it sways towards what you've been watching, but then you get a bit consumed, don't you?

Interviewer: Great. Thank you. So you mentioned a couple of times sharing information. So you might share something with your friends and go, “What do you all think of this?” What would typically prompt you to… How often do you share things, really? And then what defines whether you share something or not, or what are the different things that would make you do that?

Rachael: Again, I've got different WhatsApp groups for different interests. So I've got one called Mummy Group, which is all my friends who are mums. So we tend to share articles in there that are more like, “Have you seen this? The RVI…” it was all over The Chronicle, the RVI’s just got a bad rating for maternity, or, “This person just had a baby, or this person’s pregnant,” so I would share them there. In my general friends' WhatsApp group, we all have an interest in crime and weird stories, celebrity gossip. And so we tend to share those there.

So all the things that have been happening recently. If it's my dad, I tend to share with him some things maybe about football or maybe a bit more political. Again, he’s interested in celebrities as well, so celebrity news. But, yeah, it just would depend on what the common interest was with that person or group.

Interviewer: So you would tend to share things that you think people would find interesting.

Rachael: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: So that just depends on who you're sharing with.

Rachael: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: And you're often sharing things, I guess, with people that you think, “Not only will they like this, but they'll feel the same as me about it.” They'll agree. Are you sharing to, kind of-

Rachael: Yeah.

Interviewer: It’s hard to ask this question. Well, let's just focus on your dad, because you said you shared political stuff with him. So typically, would that be, say, you both have similar opinions? Are you sending stuff to him and saying, “Hey, look at this, let’s both be angry about this together.”

Rachael: I think with him it's to verify it because he's a bit cleverer than me and he's retired, and consumes a bit more news than me. Consumes more, like, I don't even know if he's a BBC watcher, but, or reader, I don't know what. But he definitely wouldn't, like, read the Daily Mail and stuff like that. So I verify things with him, I guess. With my friends, I would actually like it if they didn't maybe have the same opinion as me, it’s something to chat about, isn't it, and, “What do you think?” or whatever.

If it's local news, I've got friends who are in the police and stuff like that, so I might try and do a bit of digging. Get more information. They normally say, “I can’t…” If it's public, then they'll say, “Oh, yeah, blah, blah, blah.” But if they can’t say anything, they’ll just say, “It’ll come out in,” what time, whatever. But, yeah, different people, depending on what I wanted to do. So, yeah, I would say my dad verify. Friends, have a bit of a chat, a bit of a, “What do you think?” or, like, yeah, people in trusted positions like the police or whatever, then, again, verification.

Interviewer: That’s interesting. So it is a social thing but it’s also a bit of… It’s trying to get more information sometimes or a bit more-

Rachael: A rounded opinion, yeah.

Interviewer: Really interesting. Have you ever shared something in any of those situations that you didn't know at the time, but turned out to be false or fake?

Rachael: Probably all the time, but you don't always know, do you? Again, the Phillip Schofield one. I'm saying, “No, ITV have definitely got something over him, blah, blah, blah. That's why they've kept him.” I mean, it'll probably come out in time what's actually happened. But at the minute, yeah, I'm like, “No, that's happened.”

Interviewer: Have you ever shared something in good faith and then later found out, like, “Oh, that was wrong”?

Rachael: I'd say yeah, particularly with, like, maybe more local news, because sometimes it can be quite speculative or who's done what or. But yeah, all the time, I guess, particularly when it's on TikTok, I think. (Laughter)

Interviewer: So can you think of a time when you've done that and talked about you shared something, how did you then re-establish that was false? And then what happened?

Rachael: I'm trying to think of an example. Oh, yeah. Well, there was one, it was in the Chronicle saying that Newcastle United are going to buy all of this land in Gosforth. They're going to build a ladies' football stadium. They're going to bring this X, Y and Z. Sent it to my dad saying, “Oh, won’t this be great. We'll get tickets, we’ll be able to go and do this, that, and the other,” and the Chronicle were making out these are the drawn-up plans, it was definitely happening. I said, “It’ll be great, there'll be jobs, blah, blah, blah,” and then there's been nothing more.

So I don't know if it's necessarily false, but I've shared it with him. We've both got excited about it. The Chronicle has almost made out that it's 100% happening and then nothing more.

Interviewer: So has that affected the way you think about the Chronicle in terms of because you've read that in the local newspaper and thought, “Fantastic,” for all the reasons you’ve said? Has that affected the way you think about the Chronicle?

Rachael: I don't know. With local news, I think you're a bit more, like, well, a bit more passionate about them, like, “They don't do anything wrong,” but then, yeah, maybe it has made me think, like, they're just like anybody else, out to get a story, out to sell a story and make you click on it.

Interviewer: You mentioned before about you decide whether you like people or don't like people and stuff like that, and who are you going to vote for, and what you're going to buy, what you're going to have for your dinner. Have you ever, within that way of thinking, just changed your mind about something because of something you've read online? So I guess something about a person or more particularly about a certain issue maybe. Have you ever read stuff online and just thought, “Right, I've completely changed my opinion about that”?

Rachael: Yeah. All the time. For example, the thing about the RVI last week. I mean, I think with that one I only read the headline, I didn’t even read the article. But it was, like, “RVI maternity department requires improvement in CQC,” or something like that, like their Ofsted-y type check thing. That was it. I sent it to all my friends, “Don't go there to have your babies.” (Laughter) Do you know what I mean? Like, “It must be terrible. That’s my mind made up about that. I wouldn’t go there to have my kids.” I didn’t click on it. I didn’t click to see whether it was they’d got a bad rating because… it could have been anything.

I didn’t really think about it. I didn’t think, “Well, they might not have had investment because the NHS is on its knees.” I didn’t go on to think about it anymore, I was just like, “That’s it now.” I didn’t even read the article. I just shared it with people and I was, like, “Yeah, that’s it.”

Interviewer: When you talked about you verify with your dad, share with friends, blah, blah, blah. I'm assuming, tell me if I'm right or wrong, is that all through WhatsApp?

Rachael: WhatsApp or in person if I see them. Predominantly WhatsApp, I would say, with my friends. If I see my dad in person or sometimes even if it's a particularly… so the Johnny Depp case, for example, someone else at work was really into it as well. So, we’d ring each other up at the end of the day, we’d been watching it on TikTok. Chatting about what our opinions were at the end of every day. We really consumed ourselves with it. So, yeah, it just depends on when I see them.

Interviewer: So just to focus on the talking in person to people, well, even on the phone, but not through messaging apps. How often did you do that kind of thing and how are those conversations usually… how do they play out?

Rachael: Again, because my life is so busy, in the morning, as my mum arrives to get the kids, “Did you see that on the news about such-and-such?” but I don't watch the news on the telly, so that will have come from something I've seen while I've been having my coffee. Or in an evening, me and my husband will tend to, when the kids are in bed, scroll our phones and he’ll say, “Hey, watch this,” or I’ll say, “Hey, watch this,” and send him something, even if I'm lying next to him, send him something and we’ll have a chat about it.

At work, I haven’t really got… the people I work with currently in my team, we don't tend to talk about that sort of thing. More, like, not news anyway. So, yeah, I think it would be mainly in passing, like a little quick, “Have you seen this? What do you think?” Yeah. That’s just because of the nature of my busyness of life.

Interviewer: Absolutely. So it’s similar to when you're sharing in WhatsApp and stuff, it’s more just a common interest, “I bet you’ve seen this, have you seen this thing, what do you think about that?”

Rachael: Yeah. I'm not the type of person who would sit over a bottle of wine and have a debate about Rishi Sunak or whatever. That's just not me.

Interviewer: I don't think that’s anyone. (Laughter)

Rachael: Some people.

Interviewer: So you've mentioned a few different news producers and news sources, like The Sun and different things, and The Chronicle you've also mentioned. Do you think you tend to rely on some more often than others? Which ones do you rely on and why?

Rachael: Anything that's been posted on Twitter I would tend to trust a little bit more. Just because I see that as more of a social media app to discuss news and share news. But on Twitter, it tends to be that Politics Live, I think, comes up quite a lot on Twitter. The Chronicle, The Daily Mail, and then I must follow somebody who works for that… Is it GB News or something like that? That comes up quite a lot. Piers Morgan. I like Piers Morgan. (Laughter) I'm just interested in his different opinions.

I don't always agree with them, but it's the people I follow on Twitter, again, things will tend to pop up. But yeah, there are ones that I would… so, as I say, if I've seen something maybe political or about, like, say, climate or this, that, and the other, on the Daily Mail, I might go and then verify that on the BBC because I trust them a little bit more.

Interviewer: The BBC would fill that role, you think, more than others? The only one that you would rely on?

Rachael: Yeah, as a little bit more truthfulness. Yeah.

Interviewer: Has that always been the same or has anything changed around the ones you rely on when you've shifted from your laptop to the social media or has it always been the same, the ones you rely on?

Rachael: I guess it’s just as I've grown up. I recognise that The Daily Mail isn't the holy grail of truth and they're aligned to particular political parties and stuff like that, whereas I never knew that previously. So, it just makes you think a little bit more about what you're reading.

Interviewer: So, you, during the time of the study, were about 60 odd percent through social media, and 28% through sharing news from news sites. You've talked about this a bit already, but how do you feel about the role of social media as the disseminator or sharer of news, not just information, but we’ll talk about news here. How do you feel about social media as the place for people to get news?

Rachael: I mean, some people would be very strongly opinionated when they're, like, “Don't believe everything you see on social media.” But I personally think, like, it's so clever now that if there is a particular thing you're interested in, obviously more articles come up about that. So you are able to have that rounded opinion rather than just visiting one. Say the Phillip Schofield story again, before social media, I might have just gone onto the Daily Mail and read their opinion of Phillip Schofield. That would have just been it.

I would have read that or in a physical newspaper or whatever. Whereas with social media, I'm getting people's tweets, I'm getting TikTok videos, I'm getting people from America, people from the UK giving their opinions, other celebrities giving their opinions, different news sites. So that's where I've been able to go through the process of that one of making my decision about something rather than just that particular source’s opinion. So I see it as a good thing in that sense. And also because we're all so busy now as well, it just means that news can get to you faster as well.

So, I'm literally like, “Apple News, Phillip Schofield’s stepped down,” “Apple News, there's been an earthquake in wherever.” I don't then need to sit down and watch the full half an hour news about what's been going on because I've seen it all already on my watch or on social media pop up.

Interviewer: And that you think really suits you at the moment because it's busy.

Rachael: Yeah. Like, I remember my mum and dad, my mum, in particular, would always sit down and watch the news, the Six O’clock News and watch the full thing. Whereas I just don't have time to do that.

Interviewer: Your mother still does that?

Rachael: She does. Yeah.

Interviewer: So and she comes to pick the kids up. Do you think you're pretty much both still aware of the same issues, and know the same stories?

Rachael: Hmmhmm.

Interviewer: You've done it drip, drip throughout the day. She's done it in half an hour. Do you think it’s about the same?

Rachael: She's just got one person's view, though, because she’s just watched Good Morning Britain or whatever, Look North, and had their opinion, whereas I've been able to have a bit more of a rounded view, I would say because I've consumed the same story from about ten different opinions throughout the day.

Interviewer: If we just think of it as a time thing, then. So say your mother is doing 30 minutes in the evening, so many minutes watching the morning news. Do you think you're getting that more rounded opinion in less time, more time, a similar amount of time?

Rachael: Probably a similar amount of time, I would think. Yeah. But then I guess I'm sifting out all the stuff that I'm not interested in as well. So, yeah.

Interviewer: You’ve mentioned that some people would say, “Don't trust TikTok,” and your friends say that, etc. But has your trust in online news and online information been affected by things you've heard about, I guess about fake news and disinformation and fake videos and all that stuff? Has that affected…?

Rachael: No, and I'm aware of all those topics, but I think I can tell when it’s fake. This is just my opinion, these big news companies, yeah, they want clicks, they want people to read stuff and what have you, but there's always going to be some element of truth. And, like, yeah, if it was some random from America giving their opinion on Phillip Schofield, I'll still watch it, but I know I'm not going to take what they say as Holy Grail. Again, it just helps to inform my decision about that particular story or that particular topic.

Interviewer: So you don't trust everything equally, sometimes it affects your trust in that way.

Rachael: Yeah, but I maintain that awareness. So, like, I know that the Daily Mail is more aligned to the Conservatives and what have you. So I would always bear that in mind when I was reading something maybe political because I know that they're trying to inform my decision from a particular angle. And I know GB News, for example, hates the government, or Piers Morgan doesn't like particular people. I have that awareness and savviness to filter out who’s, that's their opinion or that might not be the whole truth or whatever. But I think it's quite easy to tell what's fake news.

Interviewer: So I think what you're saying is it has affected your trust in that you don't wholly trust everything, but you're able to just make those weights and measures as you go throughout the day.

Rachael: Yeah.

Interviewer: I guess the other question then is do you think that's a lot of hard work to be able to do all of that calculation? I know it's not a calculation, but you're doing a lot of weighing up and-

Rachael: Not if it's something that you're interested in, I don't think. It's just natural now. For someone like my mum, yeah, probably because she's not with technology that much. So for her, just watching the Six O’clock News is much easier. But for me, because it's so quick, like, “Right, TikTok, check on the BBC, go onto the Daily Mail. Right, this has popped up on my watch.” That's just the way I am. I don't see it as a big task, and sometimes it's actually enjoyable. Again, it's a social activity for me.

Like when the Johnny Depp case was on, I was reading articles, I was going onto the court website for the court there that they were having it in, reading all the evidence. I got proper into it and I enjoyed doing that. It was something to do away from work and life. Yeah.

Interviewer: I mean, but do you think, for example, if your mother, we keep talking about her because I guess we're just using her as an example, someone from a different generation. If they said, “Do you know what? What you're saying sounds great. I want to forget the Six O’clock news and I just want to scroll TikTok, Twitter, Facebook.” Do you think you could say to them, “Well, here's how you do it”? What do you think the danger would be for someone who didn't have this knowledge that you have about different things?

Rachael: Well, if I tried to show her, her head would just explode. With that generation, because then, as I say, they’ve got one person's opinion on it. So my mum is certain that whatever they say on whatever news she's been watching that day, that's the truth on that one because she probably hasn't even factored in her mind, “I could go and verify it on that website. Check it on this. Watch some TikTok videos.”

It just doesn't feature as a process. It's just, like, “I've watched it on… Jeremy Vine came on after the kids programmes had finished in the morning on Channel Five and I watched it by accident and that is the news, even though I don't particularly trust them.” Like, it just doesn't factor as a process for her. But I don't think it's even a generational thing because my dad's of the same generation, he's just more technologically… as I say, he’s got TikTok, Twitter, he's on his iPad all of the time, he's got an Apple Watch. So he's following the same process as me.

Interviewer: How did you develop that understanding of, you know, because what you were talking about wasn't just about left political or right political, you were talking about that, but also you were talking about individuals and newspapers and television and you were putting that all into a balanced thing. How have you learned to do that?

Rachael: Like, just over time. I always remember my grandma would have the Daily Mail, like by her sofa. And then over time, I would always be reading the Daily Mail online, because it’s the most celebrity news. And then I think one day my dad was just like, “You do realise that they're all Royalists and Conservatives,” and I went, “Oh, right.” And then there have been different programs, hasn’t there? There was the documentary about the Royal Family. I can't remember which one it was.

And that opened my eyes again to understand that the Royal Family's PR teams will write articles for certain newspapers and skew them in certain ways. There was the Raoul Moat documentary programme the other week, that was like a drama, but it was about the Chronicle and about how the Chronicle were just at that time trying to sell the stories and it didn't matter who they trampled on and stuff like that.

And also, I used to work in the PR floor for the university. So I understand, again, how articles are written. I've got that level of understanding from a professional point of view as well.

Interviewer: Great. Right, we’re good for time. You mentioned as well as your social media, you use Apple News. Could you explain? I don't have an iPhone. What is Apple News? How do you get to it? What does it look like? What sort of stuff do you read on there? Where do they get news from, etc?

Rachael: I don't know. It just pops up on my watch if there's a big news story. I don't know how to turn it off.

Interviewer: Is that from Apple? Is that saying…?

Rachael: It'll say, literally, “Apple News: Phillip Schofield resigns from ITV,” and then I won't click on it, I just read that headline and know that’s happened.

Interviewer: Okay, so they give you a headline, and then where’s that coming from, though?

Rachael: I have no idea. But there's an Apple News app on my phone as well. Sometimes, the articles will come up and I will click on them. I think I put some of those in the data diary. But I think because I flick off them on my watch, they then don't come up on my phone very often.

Interviewer: So the ones that you have clicked on. Where do those links go to?

Rachael: An Apple News app, I think it is, on my phone, yeah, but it's already on there. Like, when I bought the phone, bought the watch.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you've discussed with your friends and you've noticed when you click on certain things, it gives you more of that, etc. So, we talk about that as personalisation. So how comfortable are you with the use of these algorithms to give you personalised news?

Rachael: Again, some people are totally, like… what’s that documentary on Netflix called? “It's awful, blah, blah, blah.” But I just think it's clever. It's meaning that you can have personalisation of the things that you're interested in, that I can quickly hop on to TikTok and watch a load of videos and zone out for 10 minutes. And they’re all things that I'm interested in reading about. I don't have to go onto a website and sift through and find things that I'm interested in. Yeah, some people might say it is spying.

I don't know whether I’d ignore it, but, “They're trying to sell you things. They're trying to do this. They're spying on you.” I just don't… That's not the way I see it. I just see it as, like, this is the way news works now. Yeah, it just means that I can enjoy it and consume it in a way that's personal to me.

Interviewer: You just mentioned about spying and stuff. Have you ever been concerned or are you concerned about your personal data when you use these apps and stuff like that?

Rachael: No. Again, all the time I’ll enter competitions, fill out forms, do this, that and the other, and freely give my information away. No, I'm not…

Interviewer: Why do you think that is? Because, I mean, you know. Just to be clear what we're talking about, I know you wouldn't just go around giving people your bank details and stuff like that.

Rachael: No, just my phone number, and my email address, sometimes it might be my address. I am, like, a bit more cautious if it’s things like asking, “How many kids live in your house?” that type of thing, I’d maybe be a bit, “Ooh”, but bank details, I've never been scammed. The only time I've been scammed is when someone physically came and burgled my car and took my bank details, and that's how many years of shopping online and putting information online. I've never been, touch wood, scammed.

So, at the minute, I feel a lot more worried about that type of thing happening to me, my house getting burgled, and my car getting burgled, or my handbag or whatever, rather than someone going and taking [Rachael] from Newcastle’s details and doing something with them.

Interviewer: You mentioned that you would be less comfortable about people asking how many kids have you got and things like that. But obviously, you know, you've been getting a lot of news about pregnancy and childbirth. So are you comfortable with the algorithm, the personalisation working out, “I'm interested in childbirth and pregnancy”?

Rachael: I'm interested in. Yeah.

Interviewer: Probably because it knows that I am pregnant. You're comfortable with that? More than if somebody just outright said, “How many kids have you got in the house?”

Rachael: Hmmhmm. Something like that, yeah. Because then I would be worrying, thinking, “Are they going to try and find out what school they go to, and go to their school,” that type of thing, rather than… Yeah, I've even seen friends, things like that, being cloned. Not cloned online, but, like, fake Facebooks and stuff like that made of them, but yeah, it doesn't worry me too much.

Interviewer: That’s fine. Just one more on that sort of stuff, when you do go on websites and things and you get the pop-up to say, “Cookies,” what's your opinion on that? What do you typically do?

Rachael: I hate it when that happens. That really annoys me. Because a lot of the time as well, if I'm going on websites, in particular, if I'm searching it will tend to be on my work laptop because I don't have an iPad or anything that. So I think once by accident I allowed the Daily Mail one and it was just popping up every two minutes when I was in meetings with Daily Mail articles. I was, like, “Oh my gosh, turn that off.”

Interviewer: So you do go into them and click?

Rachael: It just pops up, “Allow, block,” and I always just click ‘block’ now. Just because of the cyber incident at the university as well. I just try to be careful. On my phone, it doesn’t phone up so much I don't think, I think it’s just on the laptop.

Interviewer: I suppose, if you're on your phone, you're more on social media than websites.

Rachael: Social media, yeah. That’s it.

Interviewer: So you wouldn’t encounter them.

Rachael: No. Yeah.

Interviewer: But I guess if you do click through, so say you go onto the Daily Mail. So say you see something on TikTok, and you click on to it and it takes you on to the Daily Mail, would you probably get asked then?

Rachael: Yes, and I just click. I don't even read it. I just click ‘block’ every time now.

Interviewer: You would always click ‘reject’, ‘block’, ‘no’?

Rachael: Yeah. Unless it then doesn’t let me on the website, then I might go back and have a look. You’ve got to subscribe for The Telegraph now I think as well, so ones will come up there asking you to pay for it. Sometimes on the Chronicle as well, surveys will pop up, and I just block them, click off them, cross them.

Interviewer: You mentioned you're fairly comfortable with personalisation. You understand whatever. Let's forget the data thing. What do you think are the main impacts of personalised news feeds on the type of information people are exposed to? So not you, just in general.

Rachael: Well, I guess because there is that personalisation, you might not find out about particular things that are happening. So for example, the other day there was a news article that had gone viral about those dogs being shot. I don't know if you saw that, someone had some dogs and they hadn't really done anything, but the police had shot them and killed them on the street. And my husband's got a real interest in animals and particularly dogs.

So that must've been coming up loads on his social media and he's interested in crime and stuff like that as well. He must have been clicking on it. So we were lying in bed and he was, like, “They're going to investigate the police, or something, about those dogs.” And I was, like, “What dogs?” he expected me to know. And he was like, “Shut up, man, you haven’t heard about the dogs?” and I was like, “No.”

Because maybe something had popped up but I just scrolled past it, or I don't know, it hadn’t been personalised to me because I may not watch videos about dogs, I don't know. But yeah, so I think he's obviously seeing totally different or maybe slightly different news to me. So it does mean that you're not… I would think that because of the Apple News thing, I am being alerted to big news stories, so if there was a disaster or a war or big celebrity news, I'm still being exposed to it, but that, sort of, like, general interest news, everybody’s is going to be slightly different depending on…

Me and my best friend, ours tends to be exactly the same because we’ve got the same interests. And I guess that would then inform opinions.

Interviewer: So you think if we did this with your friend, we would give the same personality to her?

Rachael: She would be the same, yes. Literally, it’s the same TikTok videos that we’re getting. But I guess then my mum when she’s sitting watching the Six O’clock news for half an hour, or however long it’s on, she’s watching things that may be of interest to her, might not be of interest to her. She’s watching things about football, about this, about that, she’s consuming all of the news for that day, whereas I'm just probably consuming things that are of interest to me.

Interviewer: I think that was a really interesting example, actually, that you gave about the dog story with your husband and stuff, but I mean, what do you think is then the impact of that on a country level? So people seeing different things. Do you think it has any other impacts?

Rachael: Yeah, well, he's now like, “Oh, my God, the police are awful.” I think it was the Met police, “and it's absolutely disgraceful.” I don't think he’s a particular person who's fond of the police anyway, but it's going to strengthen that view that the police are dog killers. They're going to maybe not necessarily trust them so much. So from that type of perspective, it can totally sway your opinion on things like that, big trust decisions and sometimes big decisions, sometimes little decisions, like where you shop, but sometimes big decisions like who you vote for or where you live or that type of thing.

Interviewer: I now just want to talk about news more generally. When I've been listening to the stuff you're saying, you've told this really interesting way of thinking about the difference between the Six O’clock news curated, “Here are the stories of the day,” versus the way you engage with news. So how do you feel about the level of objectivity in online news reporting? So, not all of the different ways you get, but the news people, so the BBC, the Telegraph, the Mail, etc. How do you feel about the level of objectivity in their online reporting?

Rachael: It does annoy me sometimes. Yeah, it’s a bit annoying sometimes if it goes too far. Like if you take the Royal Family example, it was the Harry and Meghan documentary that I’d been watching, I remember now. And they were saying, like, obviously, they hate the Daily Mail, they print loads of articles, like Princess Kate will wear a dress and they’ll say it’s lovely, Meghan will wear a red dress and they’ll say it’s disgusting and stuff like that. That is just a bit pathetic. It’s annoying. Why do that?

But at the same time, sometimes I think there’s got to be some element of truth in what they're saying. So, like, you'll just try and unravel it a little bit more. But I think with the way that I consume news, it doesn't become so much of a problem because I'm getting that rounded view. So, like, for example, my grandma was a Daily Mail reader, watched This Morning, didn't watch BBC News, read any other newspapers, didn't have social media, obviously.

So from her perspective, it could be quite dangerous in the fact that she was getting a curated view from one particular source that was skewed in one way. But for me, because I'm reading a variety of different stuff, I wouldn't say it is dangerous at all, because just, “There’s the way it is.”

Interviewer: Is it important to you that news sources, any type of news source, are transparent about their sources? So, you know, where they got the information from?

Rachael: Yeah. I think that's only something that I've started to think about again more recently, I know it probably sounds a bit naive. But yeah, with that whole, like, I'd never thought about the fact that the Royal Family's PR teams were writing stories and skewing them in a certain way to inform opinions about them. And sometimes it might be more helpful for them to be a bit more transparent about, “This information came from Princess Kate herself.” Do you know what I mean?

So that type of thing, just so that I can help then inform my decision. I might not have to then go off and do as much digging as I do on certain stuff. But at the same time, that is just journalism. That's how it works.

Interviewer: I guess you’ve talked about that in a quite clear way, the way you think about the sources and stuff like that. I mean, does that affect the way that you would trust something? So, like you said, in the example of the Royal Family and the Daily Mail, if they were saying, “This came from here, and this came from this source,” would that have a direct influence on your level of trust?

Rachael: Yeah, definitely. If they were able to say, “This was written alongside Princess Kate's PR team,” then I might be a bit, “Well, they probably have skewed it a little bit,” or whatever. Yeah, so I think it would inform. But for me, it doesn't really bother me.

Interviewer: What do you think that news producers, news sources, can do in this day and age to be more trustworthy or credible? What sort of things do you think they could do?

Rachael: Have that variation in opinion in terms of who's feeding into it. So I did used to enjoy watching Good Morning Britain when Piers Morgan was on it because him and Susanna sometimes would have different opinions, so it was a bit of a debate. “Ooh, I hadn't thought about it from that way or that angle.” And it wasn't like, “We're telling you the news and this is this,” like on the Six O’clock news. It was a bit more of a debate, which I guess is the way my brain works, I need to debate it in my own head to think about, “Ooh, I hadn’t thought about that angle.”

So I find that quite interesting. The TikTok videos that I tend to watch, it might be a random person speaking over a news article. So they might be from America, “The Daily Mail's reporting blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I have read this, I've read that, I've seen this,” and just them explaining their rounded opinion of something. So, yeah, I think there's no harm in, you know, as long as you've got that awareness that particular news sources can be skewed in one way. But I think the preference would be that there would be some different opinions within one article or one video or whatever it is.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's interesting that you talked about the people that go, “I've read this and this and this and I'm giving a summary.” I guess you trust news that’s presented in the same way that you make sense of it.

Rachael: Yeah. So that’s how I work through news, is to debate it in my head. Sometimes it will be a little quick debate, but sometimes it will be a bit… if it’s something I'm particularly interested in.

Interviewer: So as you described, a random from American on TikTok, and if in that case, that random American from TikTok was saying, “The Mail said this, this source have said this, this source have said this,” even if you don't know that person, would you trust them more than a single news outlet that’s saying, “Here’s our reporter’s opinion”?

Rachael: It depends on what it was. So if it was, like, say a natural disaster, where there are photos, it’s happened, it wouldn’t matter where it came from, I would believe it. So if an Apple News article popped up, or a BBC news alert, I don't have them switched on, but something like that popped up. But if it was something where there could be a few different opinions, yeah, I would believe it a little bit more if it was debated rather than be, like, “Ferne McCann is pregnant,” I'm like, “Er, she’s not. You're lying.”

Interviewer: I mean, that can’t be debated.

Rachael: Yeah. But she wasn’t. It was speculation, do you know what I mean? It ended up being a speculative article. I would maybe believe it a little bit more if someone was saying, “Well, I saw her in a shop buying a pregnancy test.” Like different opinions brought together into one.

Interviewer: Sources, basically? “She’s been seen here, with this, and also, she said it herself, or there’s a photo on her Instagram, or her doctor has accidentally told people.”

Rachael: Yes, or if it’s, like, the Meghan Markle debate, people are saying, “Well, I have seen her going to therapy,” and different stuff, “I've seen her be horrible, I've had a one to one with her and she’s awful.” Loads of different opinions into one would help me inform my decision.

Interviewer: Is it fair to say that you don't want to be told something? You want to make your own decision.

Rachael: Unless it’s a big thing. I just want to be told, “There’s a war in Ukraine, there’s this, there’s that,” yeah, fair enough, I’d just want to be told that. But if it’s something that could have a bit of debate around it, then that’s why I liked Good Morning Britain because there was that debate, it wasn’t Piers Morgan going, “This is the news, this is what's happened.” It was, “What do you think about this? What do you think about that?” and debating it.

Interviewer: Just to take the, “There’s a war in Ukraine,” great, but that’s not debated, that’s true. But then what about people then saying things like, I guess pro-Russian stuff, for example, that would be an opinion, for some people that would be definitely true. So, you know, what about that kind of debate? So if you went on TikTok and people were going, “Everybody’s got the Ukraine war thing wrong, Putin is doing the right thing, the West shouldn’t be helping them,” something like that, which is a debate.

Rachael: I think, for me, because I would tend to flick past those articles, they would never come up on my social media, and that’s how I consume news, so for me, those big things. Yeah, I've got an interest in them in the sense of I want to know what’s going on, has it ended? That sort of thing. But if an article came up on my TikTok, for example, debating whether Putin was a goodie or a baddy, I would flick past it because it’s too serious for me. I'm using news as a release from my serious day at work or the stress with the kids or whatever.

So, I would flick past it and then probably no other articles would come up for me about that. I don't tend to ever really see them because it’s… not that it's not of interest but just, yeah, from that point of view.

Interviewer: Great. And you would get that sort of news if it was something really important, you would get a push notification on your watch?

Rachael: On my watch.

Interviewer: So that’s your backup?

Rachael: Yes.

Interviewer: You’re not going to miss any world events.

Rachael: No.

Interviewer: But you're not going to go looking for them, for those sorts of things, because you’ve got a clear idea of-

Rachael: Yes, of what’s happening.

Interviewer: Great. I'm finished with my questions.

Rachael: Cool.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Rachael: Thank you. It’s been dead interesting.

Interviewer: Is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn’t? Anything else that you think we haven’t covered around these topics that you want to…?

Rachael: No, I don't think so. Yeah. I think it’s just dead interesting, isn't it? I think if my grandma could listen to this interview, she’d just faint, wouldn’t she? (Laughter) Like, “What are you on about?” but yeah.

Interviewer: A lot has changed in the way we consume news and information. Yeah. You go in the library and there’ll be loads of books about news, news values, how you make news, all the media students and language students, and there’s a brave new world now.

Rachael: Yeah, and what people are interested in as well.

Interviewer: So that’s what I'm trying to make sense of, but yes, thank you so much.

Rachael: Thank you.

END AUDIO

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