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Becoming a Listening Citizen

Long-form Citizen Journalism and the Exercise of Epistemic Rights in the Digital Age.

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John Berger could have written a book called Ways of Listening. He listened with his whole body. As though my words were rain, and he was the earth. He absorbed everything, gathered every drop, missed absolutely nothing. His listening eyes were lakes in the high mountains. It was love, there's no other word for it. I don't think that stillness, that quality of attention, is even possible in digital-age humans, who suckle on mobile phones from the moment they're born. It's a generational thing. Lost forever, I believe.

– Arundhati Roy, Mother Mary Comes to Me.

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Abstract

Access to knowledge is a vital part of a functioning society; in a digital world, the quality of knowledge acquisition, in part, depends upon the conditions afforded by technological environments. In this context, claiming a right to effective knowledge processes has not been institutionally established, but should be explored. This study looks specifically at digital long-form citizen journalism (DLCJ), exploring the everyday practices of its users through the lens of epistemic rights. Using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, it investigates the experiences and attitudes of users of the DLCJ platform, Substack. The study uses the epistemic virtues of attention and humility as analytical tools to uncover the extent to which epistemic rights are understood and negotiated in everyday use of DLCJ, exploring how the quality of civic participation is shaped. Findings suggest that DLCJ can support the exercise of epistemic rights, although unevenly. Otherwise, it is shaped by various factors such as platform design, users' cognitive capacities, and broader social norms. Participants demonstrated a strong desire and awareness for attentive and humble knowledge practices, although they primarily understood these in relation to individual needs rather than as civic contributions that benefit society, leaving the democratic potential of epistemic rights, and the virtues that sustain them, under-realised.

Abbreviations

DLCJ	Digital Long-form Citizen Journalism

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Introduction

In May 2026, during the lead up to the UK's highly polarised local elections, media attention was aggressively drawn to the Green Party leader, Zack Polanski. This attention was not focussed on the parties campaign promises, but rather on a 13-year old archive regarding breast-enlargement hypnosis. Prior to entering political office in 2013, Polanski worked as a hypnotherapist in London. At the time, he was approached by a reporter from the UK tabloid, *The Sun,* to conduct a session on theoretical breast enlargement which was later written up and published (Farley & Humphreys, 2026). This decade-old event has resurfaced on social media on multiple occasions as part of political campaigns, and to test Polanski's legitimacy in the public eye, formulating a prominent part of current knowledge pools in this domain.

More recently, Polanski has apologised and clarified the situation. He explained that he was struggling at the time holding down multiple jobs, that his work was intended to promote body confidence, that *The Sun* had misrepresented the experience, and finally that he no longer believes that hypnosis can alter body size (Walker, 2026). However, in the final moments before the May elections the UK media brought the issue to the attention of the public again, unearthing additional historical evidence to undermine Polanski's up-to-date testimony (Farley & Humphreys, 2026). The scandal became viral online and was used as a key point of debate amongst his political opponents (Reed, 2026). News coverage on the topic is repetitive, and sparse, yet the story is multiplied and sensationalised in short-form social media posts on Instagram and X, for example, Polanski is labelled a "boob whisperer" (Spectator, 2026). Furthermore, the spread of short sound bites and videos online exclude available details and context behind the actual event (BBC News, 2026; GB News, 2026).

This case signifies two key dimensions around online knowledge circulation today. Firstly, attention is redirected towards provocative headlines, as well as towards short-form and viral content. Secondly, media coverage favours events with minimal analysis or detail. Accordingly, readers' ability to control and exercise agency over their attention is compromised, as is their ability to exercise humility and critically evaluate an issue. Importantly, the fact this particular event occurred during a time in which voters take to the polls and make important decisions

illuminates how digital knowledge circulation can have wider implications for society. This event is merely one example of many cases that expose a digital landscape where knowledge production is mediated together by its social and technological environment. In light of this, the present study seeks to explore how knowledge operates within existing structures of power, and how this relates to everyday democratic life.

Current international frameworks related to knowledge access in the digital space consist of a mixture of traditional rights and the development of new rights. Traditional measures are based on freedom of expression and the right to privacy, which often need to be reinterpreted for the online environment, where speech and data spread uncontrollably. As a result, rights such as freedom of expression become more complex in digital spaces (Shany, 2023). New digital rights such as the right to internet access can be found in contemporary instruments such as The Charter of Human Rights and Principles for the Internet (Internet Rights & Principles Coalition et al., 2014). Often, internet use and data are the primary focus of these documents, with mentions of knowledge being secondary or embedded within particular articles and preambles (United Nations General Assembly, 2024, Annex I). Nonetheless, having the competence and ability to access knowledge is frequently cited across digital rights instruments as an essential condition for an equitable society.

Within EU law, the development of new age digital declarations and policy frameworks are also underway. The European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade contains six chapters covering issues related to digital inclusion and literacy, and environmental impact (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2023). Here, the term *knowledge* is not even mentioned, however factors important to effective knowledge acquisition are implicitly displayed through their support for critical thinking skills and access to diverse content. Furthermore, the EU Digital Services Act codifies some of these values, empowering citizens to challenge internet platforms on related issues (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2022). It appears that concerns around knowledge are a crucial part of new developments in international legal frameworks regarding our human rights in the digital space, however, it remains conceptually underdeveloped.

Epistemic rights have recently emerged in the literature, referring to a requirement that society should afford its communities with access to truthful information and knowledge, as well as enhance their capacity to use this knowledge for the improvement of society at large (Nieminen, 2024). This right has not yet been fully articulated amongst the masses, but its theoretical blueprint is in conception. Before the term epistemic rights was formally theorised by Watson in her book *The Right to Know: Epistemic Rights and Why We Need Them* (2021), Fricker had popularised philosophical debates around knowledge, harm and justice in her foundational work, *Epistemic Injustice* (2007). Fricker's work created a surge of nuanced debate which framed knowledge not just as something we have, but something that is layered and negotiated. For example, she argued that prejudice against the knowledge of certain individuals can cause tangible and prolonged harm, emphasising the need to understand knowledge practices in more depth.

Most recently, Horowitz et al. (2024) collected seminal works on epistemic rights in the digital age, highlighting how current policies are insufficient under today's digital proliferation. This work pushes epistemic rights out of philosophical debates and introduces its emergence into real policy discussions. If current digital rights do not go far enough to consider how the internet can manipulate our ability to share knowledge, integrating a robust doctrine of epistemic rights is an essential step towards preserving democracy and preventing systemic societal harm. At the core of this, is understanding epistemic rights in terms of everyday practices rather than abstract ideals, or legal theories.

The empirical field of this research is digital long-form citizen journalism (DLCJ), a form of online content that when embedded within an internet platform creates a distinct digital epistemic environment. Elsewhere, this format has been described in various ways by scholars primarily as a form of alternative media, and subtypically as citizen journalism or blogging (Sneh, 2025; Forde, 2014; Moyo, 2011). Instead, this thesis introduces the term DLCJ as it clearly merges the distinct qualities of the medium, which are recognised forms of media and relevant to the research questions. Firstly, it describes the features of "digital longform" which describes the characteristics related to storytelling, and immersive writing that uniquely engage readers (Hiippala, 2017, p. 420; Hededam, 2023). Secondly, it includes the condition of text

length, encompassing longer-form texts that fall between traditional book-length reading and the short-form written content commonly found online (Baron & Mangen, 2021). Finally, these pieces are not written under professional journalistic codes, but informally from the perspective of citizens themselves.

An example of a DLCJ medium online is the app, Substack. Users can both read and write articles, sharing them on the platform in a similar process to other social media apps. The key difference is that the app engages users in written articles which are comparatively longer to the content found on Instagram, or X; there is no maximum wordcount and articles typically range from 1,000-4,000 words (Günel & Orel, 2026). This thesis utilises Substack as a type of DLCJ, primarily as a point of reference for the participant recruitment and question development of the qualitative interview process. The study does not seek to draw conclusions about Substack specifically, but rather about the technological affordances associated with the format more broadly.

In epistemological theory, virtues hold a core space and influence the moral, ethical and intellectual possibilities of epistemic practice. Scholars argue that those who have developed stronger virtues have better quality processes of knowledge sharing, thus are better equipped to avoid inflicting undue harm onto other epistemic agents, providing benefits for democratic society (Fricker, 2007; Mooken, 2024). The literature on epistemic rights focuses on legal norms and principles, such as the limits of protection and the role of state action in safeguarding epistemic freedom. This pays less heed to the bottom-up perspective which involves understanding the virtuous conditions that constitute good epistemic practice itself, which can subsequently inform the strengthening of legal norms.

As previously discussed in the Zack Polanski example, contemporary events in knowledge practice suggest that the epistemic virtues of attention and humility are increasingly mediated online. Generally, attention refers not only to an individual's capacity to focus, but also to the degree of agency they possess over the direction of that focus (Sant Croix, 2024; Thrall et al., 2014; Loh & Kanai, 2016). Humility refers to recognising the limits of one's own knowledge whilst remaining open to the perspectives and knowledge of others (Srivastava, 2025; Pritchard,

2018). Both are epistemic virtues because they shape how individuals engage with knowledge and bear upon the moral quality of that engagement. Given their significance in both contemporary knowledge practices and epistemological theory, this thesis examines epistemic rights through the analytical lens of attention and humility.

Civic participation forms the final dimension of the epistemic rights framework adopted in this study. Epistemic rights are not exercised solely through the acquisition or exchange of knowledge, but through forms of participation that contribute to democratic life. Existing research has primarily examined this relationship in contexts where epistemic rights are overtly violated, such as Zimbabwe, where state regulation of knowledge production reshapes civil society and limits opportunities for participation (Chari, 2024). Whilst the latter topic must be urgently dealt with, there has been limited empirical attention to how epistemic rights are enacted within formally democratic societies where constraints are subtle and embedded in everyday socio-technical environments. In such cases, civic participation is perceived as more accessible, and constitutes activities such as the use of DLCJ, where users engage with and share information amongst each other. What remains unclear is how epistemic rights are experienced and negotiated through such everyday experiences of civic participation, and what this means for the quality of civic participation itself.

Specifically, this study examines how progressive-left DLCJ readers engage in and evaluate practices of attention and humility to understand how epistemic rights exist in reality. This is achieved through semi-structured qualitative interviews and subsequent thematic analysis, providing insight into a particular group's attitudes towards and experiences of epistemic practice. It frames the results using the terminology of epistemic rights to make a wider contribution to existing legal and social norms regarding knowledge processes in the digital age. Chapter 1 traces the current and fragmented notions of epistemic rights today, especially within the context of DLCJ. This chapter draws different conceptualisations together to form an ecological epistemic rights framework which considers them as relationally embedded in a host of everyday practices, thus should become a responsibility for all involved agents. Chapter 2 outlines the interview process, and the theoretical and methodological framework of qualitative thematic analysis which underpins this research. Chapter 3 presents the findings from the

interviews which revealed three dominant and relevant themes regarding participants, namely; the management of attention to access productive epistemic conditions; negotiated levels of humility, and presented divergent civic orientations both amongst each other and within themselves. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of these insights into the lived experiences of DLCJ users, and the implications this has for understanding the presented epistemic framework.

Overall, the study finds that epistemic rights are understood as everyday norms rather than abstract entitlements, mostly they are individualised rather than understood as collective tools for the benefit of society. Nonetheless, DLCJ readers engage in epistemically virtuous practices, albeit unevenly due to socio-technological constraints. As such, the extent to which epistemic rights enable enhanced civic participation is not determined alone by DLCJ, or the individual possession of virtuous traits, but the various socio-technological conditions which these factors are embedded within.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 The Epistemic Rights Framework

Epistemology derives from the Greek word *epistēmē*, meaning knowledge, which itself is rooted in an earlier concept of the meaning *to overstand.* This combines the sense of knowing how to overcome (*over*) with being grounded or secure in understanding (*to stand*). *Epistemology* refers to the study or theory of how knowledge is formed, whilst *epistemic* is the adjective used to describe processes related to knowledge and knowing (Harper, n.d.). The word epistemic has been used to describe various forms of action, practice, and concepts across different schools of thought, from philosophy and education to politics.

This section will introduce various epistemic forms that constitute part of a larger epistemic rights framework. It begins by introducing the challenges of epistemic practice today in which agency is negotiated and at risk of facing injustice. Secondly, the topic of epistemic rights will be introduced. The development of this concept remains ongoing and

somewhat fragmented. Various existing approaches to the meaning of epistemic rights are synthesised to inform and justify the foundation of the research framework. As a result, this section of the literature review contends that epistemic rights are potential legal avenues to individual knowledge enhancement, as well as socially embedded and everyday practices which have broader democratic implications for individuals, communities, and societies.

1.1.1 Epistemic Agency and Injustice

Researchers have pointed to the concept that individuals are epistemic agents, highlighting that one has the capacity to obtain knowledge and achieve an understanding of it (Marin, 2022; Smith & Archer, 2020; Watson, 2021). Smith & Archer (2020) point out that epistemic agents are afforded varying abilities based on their socio-demographic background. For example, a working-class child in a school may face epistemic harm in comparison to their middle-class counterparts as a result of the teacher, perhaps unknowingly, affording them a reduced opportunity to acquire knowledge (Reay, 2017). In this sense, communities are a network of epistemic agents subjecting one another to varying epistemic access. In the context of social networking, Marin (2022) analyses epistemic agency, pointing out that it does not operate in isolation but is influenced by external factors such as platform design. Generally, environments which provide users with the conditions for increased epistemic agency, where more credible knowledge can be acquired, are defined as an "epistemically productive environment" (p. 77, 2022). Being an epistemic agent is thus part of a process which occurs both online and offline, shaped by various factors within these spaces.

Fricker (2007) coined the term epistemic injustice to encapsulate these different types of harm untowards epistemic agents. Generally, epistemic injustice is "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (2007, p. 1). For example, minority voices are at the highest risk of suffering very personal, and broader injury through the various exclusions of their knowledge from discussion and debate. These conceptions of

epistemic agency and injustice depict knowledge sharing as a covertly vulnerable practice. However, empirical questions exploring how individuals evaluate their epistemic agency remain largely unanswered, despite being potentially relevant to inform new ways of protecting it. To address such gaps, the following section presents current conceptions of epistemic rights to build the core theoretical foundation of this thesis.

1.1.2 Epistemic Rights

In popular human rights theory, freedom of expression is perceived as an "essential foundation of a democratic society" (Rainey et al., 2021). Whilst the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information" (United Nations General Assembly, 1948, Article 19) scholars have pointed out that this is conceptually narrow, because protecting speech against state interference favours the needs of the ruling elite and lacks enhancement obligations for minority groups (Young, 1990). Fricker addresses this gap by looking not just at our right to speak but the conditions under which knowledge is made credible and valued.

Watson (2021) brought Fricker's ideas to life in her analysis of Purdue Pharma. Led by Arthur Sackler, the company falsely advertised the drug Oxycontin using aggressive market practices to secretly fuel its addictive nature within the context of the US opioid crisis. In this case, knowledge is compromised and manipulated, as such the epistemic rights of doctors and their patients are harmed. The profound effect of such information manipulation contributed to a large-scale opioid epidemic, highlighting how the confines of freedom of expression do not address particular conditions of knowledge circulation, and alone cannot grasp such an issue.

Instead, the epistemic concept is "ubiquitous" in its process, and goes beyond one's ability to speak as they wish. Epistemic rights encompass not just if we express ourselves, but include the context behind which this communication occurs, and the factors which shape it (Watson et al., 2024, p. 205; Horowitz et al., 2024). Beyond freedom of expression, this

term broadens our understanding of what a functioning democratic society should look like, necessitating an extension to epistemic equality as a core condition (Nieminen, 2024). McLuhan (1964) had previously stated the strong epistemic influence of the media on our communication behaviours and resulting social organisation, in his claims that “the medium is the message” (p. 7). With technology now holding an embedded place in society, theory has turned to epistemic rights to address increasing democratic challenges at the intersection of digital rights, freedom of expression and epistemology (Horowitz et al., 2024; Watson, 2021).

Watson (2021) defines epistemic rights in relation to epistemic goods, which are products containing knowledge. Using general theories on the function of rights, she frames epistemic rights as a unique category, within the existing moral and legal frameworks of today's human rights. Importantly, Watson argues that rights do not concern objects, but “actions and omissions” regarding those objects, in this case, epistemic goods (p. 3). Like all categories of human rights, their function is to protect a rights-holder which can only be a moral subject, or in other words a person. An example of an epistemic good could be online news information, the related epistemic right could be for individuals to have access to truthful information online, either through negative obligations where the state must not interfere, or through positive obligations in which the state can assist.

Alternatively, socialist thought has critiqued such liberal views of human rights for being individualistic and reinforcing of the market and private property relations which contribute to inequality itself (Marx, 1975). Socialist thought adheres that an individual right to truthful information is not enough for human emancipation and the benefit of the public good. This is in line with Marx’s argument that in practice, freedom of the individual translates to proliferation of private property, which incorporates “the right to enjoy [it]… and to dispose of it at one’s discretion…, without regard to other men, independently of society” (Marx, 1975. p. 163). Harvey (2005), argues that by institutionalising the individual as foundational to political and economic life, there is less opportunity for the open democratic governance and solidarity which can rebuild a

fragmented society. This suggests that Watson's traditional formulation of epistemic rights do not reach far enough in the fight for social justice.

Nieminen's (2024) approach extends Watson's individual notion of rights and incorporates aspects of the socialist critique. He grounds epistemic rights within the social justice discourse as a tool to reduce inequalities, specifically in the form of knowledge gaps. Two examples of epistemic rights he describes are;

> *Equality in obtaining competence in critically assessing and applying knowledge for citizens' own good as well as for the public good,*
> *Equality in public deliberation about will formation and decision making in matters of public interest.* (Nieminen, 2024, p. 14).

For Watson, individuals are entitled to traditional claims of positive action which strengthen their own epistemic rights, furthermore, they are entitled to resist forms of interference that inhibit them. For Nieminen, by framing public deliberation and competent critical assessment as necessary epistemic rights for the greater "public good", the concept moves beyond the individual pursuit of epistemic goods into the enhancement of our collective epistemic capacity (2024, p. 15). Bringing Nieminen's work together with Watson's strengthens the theoretical framework to research how effectively these rights appear in everyday practice and the extent to which they benefit society.

Whilst the research on epistemic rights makes clear that institutional protections and actions should exist to protect individuals and society, less apparent is the epistemic role of individuals themselves. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the role of the individual is most clearly addressed in Article 29(1) (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The majority of the instrument focuses on state obligations to protect individuals but this specific provision places corresponding duties directly on rights-holders, emphasising their responsibility to the broader community. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights more robustly challenges individualistic perceptions of human rights in its inclusion of a significant number of collective rights, such as the right to natural

resources (African Union, 1981). Furthermore, it states clearly in the preamble; “the enjoyment of rights and freedoms also implies the performance of duties on the part of everyone” (p. 2). The inclusion of these provisions suggest that the exercise of epistemic rights cannot be understood solely in terms of institutional protection, but must also account for the responsibilities of individuals, a perspective developed throughout this thesis.

Underlying this thesis are socialist critiques and the ethical foundations of the African conception of human rights to understand epistemic rights not merely as individual liberties but as rights embedded within social relations. At the same time, it adopts the terminology and certain conceptual features of liberal accounts of epistemic rights, as this discourse is more fully developed and the terminology is relevant, rather than abstract, to the present social system serving a pragmatism beyond the research. Thus, the resulting epistemic rights framework is hybrid; it retains the practical and analytical strengths of liberal rights discourse whilst grounding epistemic rights within a relational and socially oriented understanding of human development.

1.1.3 Epistemic Virtues

Fricker (2007) introduced the term “virtuous hearer” to describe how an epistemic agent has developed a set of ethical-intellectual virtues which allow them to improve their lives through processes of knowledge sharing. This concept is useful in extending current understandings of epistemic rights beyond state responsibility, and towards the social role of the individual. For example, possessing the virtue of hermeneutical justice entails that a hearer has the capacity to recognise when they may offer an epistemic agent less credibility due to social biases. Therefore, they can adjust their capacity accordingly to benefit the speaker. Fricker’s work is limited to the two virtues of hermeneutical and testimonial justice, which are abstract in that one cannot be made consciously aware of them as they occur. However, they justify the exploration of epistemic virtues and understanding how positive epistemic practice can manifest.

More practically, researchers have foregrounded epistemic humility, an ancient virtue in which one critically recognises the limits of their own knowledge (Srivastava, 2025). The virtue of humility aligns with the epistemic rights laid out by Nieminen (2024) which call for equal competence in critical thinking. Like Fricker, Mooken (2024) argues that this epistemic virtue needs to be understood as an individual capacity. For example, she places a level of responsibility on individuals to avoid overconfidence in their knowledge claims to better solve the world's problems. Whilst she emphasises the democratic importance of individuals existing in more pluralistic ways of knowing, her work does not offer tangible solutions. More concretely, Wong (2025) explores deep reading of longer texts, as a practice which can strengthen virtues like humility. Deep reading and its relationship with humility will be explored in Section 4 as a method of strengthening epistemic capacity.

Foundational accounts in epistemology are anchored in one of either virtue or rights-based frameworks remaining individualised, thus failing in developing an account of epistemic environments as relational and dynamic structures (Fricker, 2007; Watson, 2021). As Navorro and Vizuete (2025) illuminate in critique of Fricker, a more robust alternative approach would be structural rather than transactional. They argue for a shift in focus away from the responsibility of one's personally cultivated virtues, such as recognising the failures on part of the hearer. Instead, they support a more nuanced understanding which considers the context in which the individuals are situated, not only shaped by their own epistemic capacities but many other competing factors. This emphasises that whilst we should consider the role of the individual, we must not overburden them with responsibility.

Conceiving of the role of the individual and their virtues as complex, and mediated can be explored in terms of its relationship to the state. Like humility, attention is also considered to be an epistemic virtue (Sant Croix, 2024; Mooken, 2024). In Fortney's (2025), exploration of the right to attention he introduces the subsequent "right to strengthen our ordinarily weak capacity to control how we direct our attention" (p. 77). Fortney's synthesis of capacity and rights, illustrates how virtue cultivation is not only an individual matter, but also a political responsibility. In a rapidly evolving technological context,

having the capacity to negotiate influential digital systems should be a shared responsibility for all agents (Singun, 2025; United Nations, 2023).

Furthermore, Bombaerts et al. (2026) explore attention as embedded more generally in "bodily, sociotechnical and moral frameworks" (p. 477). This approach more broadly moves the epistemic framework beyond individual agency and political guarantees, into a broader ecology. Bombaerts et al. suggest that by training our moral ability to attend to objects or others, communities can establish caring networks. This implies that functioning epistemic virtues can have socially collective implications, and sits in contrast to existing understandings of attention merely as an individual resource, or a business resource (Davenport & Beck, 2001). This justifies their argument that attention is an epistemic good that not only needs protecting through law, but requires institutional action to enhance social norms and structures. Following such shifts, individual virtues of attention are more likely to be cultivated, further reinforcing enhanced social norms. They perceive the cultivation of attention as a democratic tool, contributing to a "wholesome" society (Bombaerts et al, 2026, p. 481). This approach informs the present study which understands epistemic rights not just as claims and protections, but as everyday allowances of virtuous practice which are compromised by various socio-technological constraints, within an epistemic ecology.

1.1.4 Epistemic Rights in Practice

Developing the discourse of epistemic rights around this ecology remains urgent. This is evident in cases such as Zimbabwe's internet shutdowns, where the government has used digital restrictions to control information and suppress political engagement (Chari, 2024). These shutdowns prevent citizens from accessing, sharing, and reporting knowledge, simultaneously undermining other rights such as the rights to protest and access healthcare. This example supports Nieminen's argument that restrictions on epistemic goods produce wider harms to collective democratic capacity, as well as Bombaerts'

description of the power of our epistemic ecology, justifying this thesis' adoption of a relational understanding of epistemic rights.

However, it is not enough to understand this issue only in terms of violations. Whilst Nieminen (2024) rightfully emphasises the need for epistemic equality through illustration of case studies, discussion should extend to examples where citizens are afforded the opportunity to exercise their epistemic rights. This helps us define what a truly equal "epistemic commons" has the potential to look like (Nieminen, 2014, p. 1). As Eve Tuck (2009) reminds us, studies which counter the debilitating, or immortalising, effect of "damage-centred" research, through a proactive "desire-based" approach, provide future models of change (pp. 409-16). Thus, the present research seeks to explore epistemic rights as a productive concept, looking at how they can support the public good.

This section has established that epistemic rights concern access to and use of epistemic goods, the importance of cultivating epistemic virtues as part of this relationship, and that equality and access to epistemic rights benefits the public good. Accordingly, engaging in virtuous practices with epistemic goods can be understood as one method of *exercising epistemic rights.* This phrase will be used hereafter to describe the extent to which one makes use of available epistemic goods and virtues in a liberating way for themselves, and society. Specifically, the term will be used to explore the existing access to and cultivation of the virtues attention and humility, when reading DLCJ, as essential for good quality civic participation (Horowitz et al., 2024; Wong, 2025). This exploration functions as an empirical contribution to the emerging theory of epistemic rights, helping to build an understanding of how the ideals of epistemic rights are enacted and understood through everyday practice.

1.2 An Epistemic Environment: Digital Long-Form Citizen Journalism

> *The people formerly known as the audience are those who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, … competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the*

> *population listened in isolation from one another—and who today are not in a situation like that at all.* (Rosen, 2012)

This poetic articulation of citizen journalism and the shifting of power in the media landscape illustrates the counter-hegemonic role that citizen journalism plays in society, providing a useful entry point for understanding its wider epistemic and democratic significance. This section will outline the empirical field of this study DLCJ, addressing each of its dimensions; citizen journalism and longform text, which encapsulates a medium for civic participation.

Citizen journalism in basic terms is "the creation and dissemination of news, information, photos, videos, or analysis by ordinary citizens" (Sneh, 2025). It can more broadly be defined under alternative media, which Forde (2014, p. 132) argues "encompasses radical, community, grassroots, independent, citizens' media forms". The emergence of this format of media resolves criticisms of traditional media which claim it is constrained editorially, and narrowed by professionalism and objectivity, rather than participation and plurality (Forde, 2014). However, critics of citizen journalism have pointed out that instead, it risks bias and spreading of misinformation, therefore, calls for enforcement of rigorous standards and training of citizen journalists have been made (Zhou, 2025). Such critiques often assume that journalistic legitimacy must conform to the epistemic norms of mainstream media. As Moyo (2011) argues, alternative journalism provides a welcome divergence from the mainstream and is not intending to mirror its empiricism and objectivity. Instead, it counters this format, by providing diversity, plurality and openness. Citizen journalism must "therefore not be judged on the basis of what mainstream journalism is, but instead what news is" (p. 757).

An additional counter to the critique related to bias and misinformation can be located in Forde's (2014) research which found that citizen journalists are motivated by a desire to educate their readers on how to become more politically engaged. Her research took insights from independent journalists who endeavoured to explore and contextualise the news they shared, and were prepared to take salary cuts to be involved in efforts they perceived as contributing to social change. This suggests that critiques related to bias and misinformation should be considered in a case-by-case context, rather than generalised.

Whilst Forde's work refers to alternative journalists within paid organisations and not to independent blog writers, which is the focus of the present study, there is evidence of the latter demonstrating similar motivations. For example, in the case of Zimbabwe where epistemic rights are extensively violated, citizens write blogs to spread awareness of stories suppressed by authoritarian rule. These blogs operated as a counter-hegemonic channel in which citizen journalists could mobilise others to challenge state-led human rights violations (Moyo, 2011). Citizen-written, alternative journalism thus is a practice which seeks to avoid the regulations adopted by mainstream media so that a range of voices can uncover truths for the benefit of society.

These accounts are useful in perceiving alternative media as a tool for political pluralism; however, they stop short in their analysis of the media as an epistemic environment. Carlson's (2019) research into media epistemologies emphasises the importance of this discursive extension by highlighting that conditions of knowledge production are a prerequisite for democratic conditions like political pluralism. Carlson argues that news becomes knowledge not simply through its creation but through its acceptance and circulation amongst the public, which is largely influenced by the socio-technical constraints of the digital age. Whilst traditional journalism relied on professional norms to stabilise epistemic authority, the digital environment is characterised by fragmentation, where authority is contested and knowledge is shaped through "circulation practices" such as commenting, sharing, and reinterpretation (Carlson, 2019, p. 230). Within this context, alternative citizen media is not just a counter-hegemonic practice, but a contested epistemic environment which generates varying conditions of knowledge engagement determining its democratic essence. As such, this study sheds light on the particular conditions of DLCJ with regards to everyday knowledge circulation.

1.2.1 Long-form Text

Within this broader shift toward participatory media, the format and medium of the content varies. Long-form content emerges as a distinct format that sits independently from short-form, rapid-consumption content which has become the norm (Baron, 2015). In the online space,

temporality can encompass both written content but also videos, which are a popular and addictive way of consuming information online (Chen et al., 2023). Short-form videos have been compared to long-form videos, with the former argued to be more popular, showcasing higher engagement, despite its associations with decreased attention and mental well-being (Violot et al., 2024; Wu et al., 2021, Lin et al., 2024). In general, shorter form material in the digital space takes precedence, illustrating a structural dominance. Anisette and Lafreniere (2017) conceptualised the 'Shallowing Hypothesis' after finding that social media users face a reduction in cognitive reflection and depth as a result of their engagement in rapid online practices. Thus, what is most accessible to online users, is potentially worse for knowledge circulation and well-being.

Offline reading practices have long been regarded as an activity that contributes to a "richer and more satisfying life" having benefits for development and citizenship (Kirsch et al., 2002, p. 12). Existing research highlights the detrimental impact of reduced reading capacity on individual cognition. Hakemulder & Mangen's (2024) study found that the frequency of reading short-texts online was associated with reduced cognitive capacities for depth and meaning. The authors found this had implications for personal educational development such as reduced reading skills and reflective practices. Baron & Mangen (2021, p. 256) importantly distinguish between "long long-form" content, such as entire books, and "short long-form", more akin to articles of around 2,000 words and resembling the DLCJ examined in this study.

Long-form reading in general has been shown to contribute to positive cognitive and social skills; such assessments are prevalent in a wide range of literature across the fields of education, democratic theory, and philosophy. McQuillan and Conde (1996), and Wig et al. (2025) both refer to the term *flow* to describe a state of serious attention when reading. Both studies see this state as leading to an optimal experience of engagement which can be intellectually motivating. However, this state of flow is not determined by text length alone. Rather, it is shaped by a range of contextual factors, including the format of the reading, the reader's level of interest, and the presence of external distractions. Therefore, the present study does not claim long-form content to be sufficient on its own to strengthen epistemic rights, but as one potential condition.

Staudinger's (2017) research on student reading behaviour found that deep reading is as important to democratic theory as deliberation is. She demonstrated this through evidence that students who engaged in deeper reading had improved reflection and critical thinking, resulting in better quality political judgements. Additionally, she argued that reading allows for alternative and marginalised voices to be included in knowledge-formulation, this does not occur simply through a deliberation that excludes the assessment of new perspectives. Thus, Staudinger bridges reading practices with wider processes of informed participation in political life. The established epistemic rights framework also calls for accessible and competent knowledge formation for democratic life, suggesting reading is a form of exercising epistemic rights (Nieminen, 2014). However, the literature on reading and civic participation is largely conducted in relation to higher education, using students as research participants. What is less explored is how this relationship is scaled to everyday practices where reading is a voluntary task shaped by external distractions and interferences.

Wong (2025) builds on Staudinger's work by embracing a more generalisable virtue-based approach. He goes beyond academic reading by arguing that the act of engaging in deep reading cultivates virtues of humility and care. These virtues align with the civic virtues necessary for democratic participation as established in political science, further positioning reading not only as a tool for improved political judgement but as a broader social practice (Scudder, 2020). Wong's theorising which bridges together concepts of epistemic virtues, civic participation and long-form reading, will be explored in more depth in Section 4.

1.2.2 Digital Long-form

There is a plethora of studies which argue that paper based long-form is more effective in cultivating cognitive engagement in comparison to reading blogs, casting doubt over DLCJ as a positive space for exercising and enhancing our epistemic rights (Baron & Mangen, 2021; Torppa et al., 2020; Duncan et al, 2015). The digitalisation of long-form written content has negatively influenced the length of texts we read, and our reading habits, putting engagement at risk due to increased practices of skim-reading and acts of jumping to the conclusion (Wolf, 2018). However, evidence shows more ambiguity than absolute negativity. Delgado et al.'s

(2018) meta-analysis extended the analysis of the Shallowing Hypothesis by comparing reading practices, and comprehension, across print and paper. Under time pressure, screen use was found to be inferior. Text-length was not found to have moderating effects across digital and print reading, but scrolling - a practice unique to long-form reading on screens - did have negative effects. Alternatively, Sahin & Alsancak (2011) found that scrolling can enhance retention compared to swiping between pages, complicating any certainty around the influence of screen-based and long-form reading. The present research provides necessary qualitative evidence about the extent to which the digital space compromises long-form reading as an epistemic practice.

Furthermore, as established in Section 1, exercising epistemic rights is not only about cognitive capacities, but simultaneously about our social capacity to use knowledge as a democratic tool for social change. In this sense, DLCJ occupies an important middle ground; it offers greater depth and complexity than dominant short-form media, whilst functioning within participatory, pluralistic spaces of knowledge production. This necessitates further investigation of the medium into its potential as a condition to strengthen our epistemic capacity.

1.2.3 Civic Participation

Civic participation is a broad concept which encapsulates various forms of citizen engagement in social and public issues (Park et al., 2023). It is not limited to one particular medium, often voluntary, and embedded within community efforts (Haro-deRosario et al. 2018; Putnam, 2000). Existing audience research on blogging provides evidence that this is a space for community building and gathering like-minded individuals (Kaufhold et al., 2010; Ostertag & Ortiz, 2014; Baumer et al., 2011). Media has become more participatory as a result of alternative citizen-media formats, such as blogs, marking a shift from hegemonic journalist-audience divides. Today there is more opportunity for a collective and non-extractive method of sharing information (Anderson, 2025). Accordingly, use of DLCJ constitutes a form of civic participation.

Veenstra (2008, 2014) has conducted multiple data surveys to capture the relationship between political blog reading and increased political participation. He defines political participation in terms of engagement in the electorate and in political organisations, as well as the ability to think about and discuss politics in a sophisticated manner. Whilst it is not the exact same as civic participation, there is a cross-over in terms of it including the voluntary capacity to engage in society. His studies which have incorporated the attitudes of a large sample size highlights that there is a strong correlation between the two conditions. Beyond politics, engagement in everyday cultural activities such as the arts, reading, and heritage have also been positively associated with higher levels of civic participation which refers to community engagement and social activities, like volunteering (Campagna et al., 2020).

Both these studies emphasise a relationship between engaging in political and cultural activities, and increased forms of civic participation more broadly, yet neither provide an analysis of the quality of the initial activities. On this issue, Anderson's (2025, p. 565) collection of the testimonies and experiences of citizen media producers highlights how they operate under a "reimagined" epistemology, in which their primary goal is to provide knowledge with a social purpose, and make a difference in their community. Here the quality of knowledge-producing activities are addressed, yet missing are accounts of whether this perceived purpose of citizen media is reflected in the quality of audience participation, something best explored by researching the audience themselves (Atton, 2008). This research investigates if citizens are making sense of the reimagined epistemology as desired, in order to defend alternative media as a democratising tool. Accordingly, the present study does not seek simply to restate any positive relationship between DLCJ and civic participation, but to explore the epistemic quality of that participation in greater depth. This will provide insights on whether those with higher levels of civic participation, more narrowly make use of virtuous practices such as humility, thus acting as an effective part of epistemic life.

This section argues that DLCJ is an epistemic site offering a potential counter-condition to the dominance of short-form, rapid-consumption media. Research links short-form digital practices to reduced attention and cognitive depth, and offline long-form reading with reflection, critical thinking, and civic participation. However, evidence on digital long-form reading remains

limited, especially in relation to its capacity to support deep comprehension and sustained engagement, and whether it can replicate the democratising function historically associated with traditional reading. Thus, DLCJ acts as an important empirical field for an exploration of a medium which sits in the middle of the debate. Such a focus can spotlight the extent to which such everyday online practices can function as the exercise of epistemic rights, informing ways to strengthen the quality of civic participation.

1.3 Epistemic Attention: Cognition and Autonomy in the Digital Age

Attention has been widely explored in varying fields of literature including cognitive science, philosophy, and politics. In cognitive science attention research attempts to provide a foundation regarding its meaning and purpose, largely being explored as an evolutionary tool that filters out distractions (Lev-Ari et al, 2022). Today in the social sciences, it is commonly described as a scarce resource especially in relation to our socio-technical environment which has greatly influenced how and when one can use their attention (Seaver, 2023; Thrall et al., 2014; Belgroun et al., 2025). Discussions on how technology has compromised our cognitive attentive abilities have been framed as a public health issue, on one end arguing it damages mental well-being and productivity. It has also been framed as an ideological issue, with concerns around the commodification of attention affecting privacy and autonomy in a capitalist world (Burnett & Mitchell, 2025). Considering the vulnerability of attention, this section demonstrates how concerns around the attention economy have led to a development in the claim for a right to attention.

Section 1 raised humility as an epistemic virtue which supports pluralistic and self-critical knowledge formation. Whereas humility is largely discussed as a condition for better knowledge consumption, attention plays a more constitutive role as a prerequisite of the digital space's functioning, because without attention we cannot begin to receive information online (Plaisance & Piantoni, 2026; Seaver, 2023; Watzl, 2022). Therefore, attention precedes the practice of humility. Whilst attention has also been theorised as an epistemic virtue wherein variations in its availability shape how individuals engage with knowledge claims and exercise epistemic agency, this section focuses on attention as a prerequisite for knowledge formation (Sant-Croix, 2024).

Specifically, it explores how attention is compromised by broader cognitive, economic, and political structures, arguing that an epistemic right to attention could help to restore and protect it. The following Section 1.4 will focus on humility as an epistemic virtue, and the importance in cultivating it to benefit our epistemic rights. This is not to suggest that attention is not a virtue to be cultivated, or that a right to humility is insignificant. However, to benefit the research structure and build on the current trends in the literature, this thesis divides the exploration of legal and social methods to strengthen epistemic rights between these two virtues.

1.3.1 The Attention Economy

This section explores the attention economy and how it compromises individual attention and autonomy, before placing these debates within an epistemic rights framework. It argues that many contemporary digital environments increasingly organise attention through extractive processes, thus users' capacities for attentive participation are constrained. By looking at how social media design obscures information, and how technology can alter cognitive habits and create inequalities, this analysis shows that the attention economy systematically restricts user's basic capacity to build knowledge.

The attention economy has been used to define the problematic attention-technology relationship by describing the increasing extraction and commodification of individual attention by big tech corporations, as a means to use our data for financial and commercial gain (Mariani, 2025; Jablonsky et al., 2022). For example, certain digital concepts like hyper-nudges, which are digital notification features, undermine individual autonomy by encouraging the user to behave in a consumerist way they may have not otherwise, covertly influencing our choices in exchange for capital (Mills, 2022). This is seen as non-consensual interference in our attention so that merchants and tech companies can gain from our data (Chomanski, 2023). These negative effects are seen as a form of epistemic injustice that limits our agency in knowledge production (Burnett & Mitchell, 2025).

In particular, social media is infamous for redirecting our attention in ways beyond individual control. For example, Non-Governmental Organisations find themselves competing for public attention in their online communications and often become invisible in the face of a dense and commercial media landscape. Consequently, documenting human rights violations and calls for collective action take a back seat in the online environment, with figures as high as 40% of social impact Non-Governmental Organisations failing to break into media streams and news stories (Thrall et al., 2014). This not only sheds light on how much information gets lost between social media and individual consumption, but also that it is not neutral and influences agenda-setting in knowledge circulation (Bhagwat, 2022). Beyond the democratic fallout of communities missing out on vital news, there is also a cognitive harm. Since the introduction of the internet in 1993, neuroimaging has discovered structural changes in the brain which are associated with reduced deliberation and shallow processing skills (Loh & Kanai, 2016). Such evidence warrants an examination of how users of digital media understand their attention capacity themselves, in order to establish if there is an awareness of how to improve the exercise of epistemic capacities.

Chomanski (2023) argues that the attention economy is not as bleak as it seems, that the advertising mechanisms allow us to receive services, such as videos, for free and that if necessary individuals can opt-out of adverts by paying for premium subscriptions. Not only does this undermine the previously established negative consequences of the attention economy, it also dismisses technology users in varying contexts. Digital tool use is currently being scaled out in developing regions as a means to improve education, and in these cases users may not have the same capacity to opt-out of the attention economy that Western projects bring them. For marginalised learners in Kenya and Sierra Leone, low-cost tech interventions such as phone-based tutoring are being used as interventions for epistemic access (Angrist et al., 2023). In these cases, by increasing phone usage without providing innovative or non-digital alternatives to the ailments of the attention economy, Chomanski’s laissez-faire approach to opt-out becomes increasingly inapplicable.

This contextual tension is further illustrated by environments where digital technology has been in sustained, mature use. In Sweden, following documented damaging effects of computers on students' focus, educators have begun weaning technology out of daily classroom life, opting for traditional pen and paper to reclaim attention (Reichmuth, 2026). Consequently, this comparison

demonstrates that the attention economy's harms over knowledge consumption are occurring at different rates across different global contexts. It implies that the extraction of attention cannot be overcome by a simple individual choice to opt out, because it is deeply embedded in wider structures of power. In this sense, marginalised communities may rely on digital technologies to achieve educational and social inclusion, whilst simultaneously becoming increasingly exposed to environments that can compromise sustained attention and epistemic participation over time. This justifies an exploration of alternative digital and epistemic environments to understand their negative and positive effects on our attention, and importantly their potentials in a technology integrated world.

1.3.2 The Epistemic Right to Attention

This sub-section argues that positioning attention as an epistemic right helps clarify the challenges of the digital age, moving beyond technological considerations into a wider social and legal argument about knowledge formation.

In response to growing concerns surrounding the commodification of attention, scholars have increasingly called for legal and policy interventions capable of regulating harmful digital design practices (Mariani, 2025). Belgroun et al. (2025) conceptualise attention as a common good, arguing that interventions such as technological taxation could disincentivise the development of applications and algorithms that undermine attentional capacities. Alongside these proposals, recent legal cases against major technology firms, including Meta's 2026 settlement regarding addictive platform design, demonstrate growing institutional recognition of the harms associated with persuasive digital environments (New Mexico ex rel. Torrez v. Meta Platforms, Inc., 2023). Such developments demonstrate increasing regulatory shifts surrounding persuasive design and platform governance.

Watson (2021, p. 75) frames attention as a fundamental capacity of the "knower". The knower is an agent capable of acquiring knowledge and truth, and disruptions to attention can be analysed not simply as instances of platform manipulation against individuals, but more broadly as constraints on the conditions under which individuals can have epistemic agency. This is the

theoretical basis for examining attention as an epistemic right, rather than just a cognitive capacity. The history of human rights discourse demonstrates how adopting rights-language can effectively legitimise and legalise institutional protections in the digital sphere. Initiatives such as the Portuguese Charter of Human Rights in the Digital Age illustrate how the digital rights discourse is increasingly under constitutionalisation to enhance state and corporate responsibilities within emerging technological environments (Bieliakov et al., 2023).

Within this context, scholars have demonstrated a growing interest in the right to attention as a necessary response to digital interference which undermines autonomy. Tran (2016, p. 1027) argues that a right to attention is necessary because the information receiver is typically the "little guy" in an unbalanced conversation with powerful corporate and state actors. Thus, such a right would help defend individuals against larger powers and preserve their dignity. Fortney's (2025) account, as previously addressed, argues that our individual capacity to direct our attention has become weakened by the attention economy, therefore a right is necessary for the redevelopment of this cognitive capacity. Kärki & Kurki (2023, p. 86) emphasises the moral importance of attention by noting how interference may prevent an individual from carrying out something "meaningful", which can have wider effects on others. These motivations underlying the burgeoning literature on the right to attention reflect concerns around the structural pressures of the attention economy, the ways digital environments threaten human cognition, and the moral implications of our attentive behaviour.

However, there is no clear consensus on how this right should be defined or grounded, with existing approaches differing in emphasis. For example, Tran (2026, p. 1027) takes a legal approach, defining the right to attention as an already existing "bundle" of rights in the US Constitution, requiring further statutory recognition. Alternatively, Chomanski (2023) takes a liberal approach, as he considers attention a condition of one's personal sovereignty, thus he suggests it requires negative protections which do not interfere with this. Fortney (2025), draws philosophically on Buddhist ethics such as mindfulness training, arguing we can strengthen our capacity to direct our attention to promote liberated human suffering. Here, there is no consensus on whether the right to attention entails both positive and negative obligations, and also if attention itself is an individual resource, or a common resource.

Bombaerts et al. (2026) argue that existing policy initiatives and legislation, whilst important, merely use rights discourse to negotiate the negative and positive effects that attention imposes on individuals specifically. By deeming attention as an individual right, any subsequent policies are limited to liberal enhancements of freedom through privacy measures, mental-health protections, or content moderation. Whilst important, these outcomes obscure the collective impact of attention related to power and inequality, suggesting that legislation does not go far enough to address the root problems of the commodification of attention. Attention is then co-opted under existing social and legal norms to reinforce individual perceptions of society, thus further theoretical developments of the right to attention as a democratic tool must consider this nuance.

Overall, this section establishes an epistemic right to attention as the legal and normative standard necessary to protect social knowledge within the digital space, further justifying the adoption of rights terminology within the studies epistemic framework. However, it demonstrates that this concept does not exist without challenges and current understandings remain incohesive. Furthermore, current research focus is primarily on the vulnerabilities of attention and the conceived methods of its protection, leaving unanswered; how do digital users navigate attention-compromised environments in reality, in other words, to what extent do users exercise their epistemic right to attention? The following section will transition from these structural safeguards to explore the active, behavioral practices, such as deep reading and epistemic humility, that users employ to defend their epistemic life.

1.4 Becoming a Listening Citizen

This section uses evidence of attention activism and attention sanctuaries to move the focus away from the extractive and narrow mechanics of the attention economy and towards an exploration of the addressed epistemic ecology (Burnett & Mitchell, 2025; Bombaerts et al., 2026). It argues that whilst we must understand how to protect epistemic goods from being commodified, we must also employ alternative social relations to actively improve access to and cultivate the epistemic virtues required for a more effective democratic life. Specifically, this section will culminate in looking at the practice of deep reading as one method.

In Section 1, Fricker's notion of the "virtuous hearer" was presented, illustrating how individuals who have strong epistemic virtues are able to consume knowledge with less prejudice and offer more credibility to marginalised viewpoints, reducing potential epistemic harms. This section will reframe this concept using Scudder's (2020) notion of the "listening citizen", positioning DLCJ as a practical "commons" where epistemic rights are actively and collectively exercised through virtues involved in civic participation, leading to more democratic societies (Belgroun et al., 2025, p. 2). Ultimately this section argues that conditions of civic participation are a vital part of strengthening epistemic rights, specifically, reading practices enhance civic participation thus should be made more accessible within our digital space

1.4.1 Beyond the Attention Economy: The Epistemic Ecology & Civic Participation

Underlying this subsection is the aforementioned ecological approach to the exercise of epistemic rights detailed by Bombaerts et al. (2026). They emphasise that epistemic rights are not just about individual gratification, but also moral, social, and political activity which can contribute towards the "alleviation of suffering" (p. 486). It spotlights the role of civic participation in this ecology as a form of community building which can contribute towards such social change, as already established in Section 1.2.

The logic of Bombaerts et al. aligns with emerging forms of attention activism, which demonstrate collective civic participation as a method to resist the "undesirable effects of the attention economy" (Burnett & Mitchell, 2025, p. 6). Burnett & Mitchell's analysis of attention activism highlights the creation of "sanctuary spaces" which have emerged as a vital grassroots intervention (p. 8). These tailored, offline environments often built within existing legacy spaces, such as youth centers, allow communities to collaborate on ways to protect and improve their attention capacities. These sanctuaries demonstrate that when the digital environment violates an individual's epistemic right to pay attention, citizens understand the value of seeking collective, and integrated alternatives to restore it.

Differently, individualistic approaches such as self-organised digital detoxes attempt to mitigate these harms by bringing users to temporarily opt-out of technology in a private manner (Syversten & Enli, 2019; Burnett & Mitchell, 2025). Through these quiet disconnections, citizens seek to escape cognitive interference and reconnect with their immediate communities (Sutton, 2020). Critics argue that digital detoxing risks placing an unfair, romanticised sense of responsibility onto the individual, ignoring the reality that digital participation will continue to be vital in modern social life. Instead, this activity can be accounted for with more nuance. Firstly, whilst a digital detox is a private act, it can have impacts across the private, public, and social sphere (Gardenier et al., 2024). For example, even if someone makes an individual digital choice for mental health, this can benefit how they interact with their political and social networks. Secondly, we can see the epistemic ecology in practice when these detoxes transform into collective movements, with groups organising detoxes together. In such cases, they evolve from private self-improvement into a demand for the public good (Syversten & Enli, 2019; Gardenier et al., 2024).

Attention activism as illustrated, can be broadly encapsulated under the exercise of epistemic rights as defined in Section 1, which describes how individuals and communities have access to, and use epistemic capacities for social change. Gardenier et al. (2024) assesses this concept through the notion of "technological citizenship" which views activities of citizens in digital spaces, not as isolated behaviours but as methods to navigate the harms of the digital space. For example, Mastodon is an open-source, collectively owned internet platform with its own social media applications that relinquish corporate ownership and do not conform to the attention economy. Mastodon is an example of communities taking action to empower themselves and become resilient in the face of digitalisation. In these cases, epistemic rights are constantly being exercised (Gardenier et al., 2024) . These actions have ecological consequences for alternative community building and epistemic space, emphasising the need for development and defence of epistemic rights.

The present study collects data based on citizen experiences of DLCJ, producing insightful understandings around how epistemic rights are being civically exercised in existing online spaces and building on the discourse of epistemic civic participation. Ideally, if reading DLCJ

can help individuals to maintain or even enhance epistemic capacities of attentiveness and humility, then it could be adapted as a useful condition to exercise our epistemic rights. With the proliferation of screen use driven by the increasing adoption of AI and the global expansion of digital technologies, it is important to identify and invest in constructive practices that foster healthier forms of engagement not only offline, but online as well (Davenport et al., 2025; Angrist et al., 2023).

1.4.2 Epistemic Humility

The literature review has already defined humility to be an epistemic virtue in which evidence and knowledge are approached with critical reflexivity. In doing so, one accepts the limits of their own knowledge, enabling them to maintain an openness to alternative views. Secondly, although more briefly, humility has been framed as an epistemic virtue which can be cultivated and developed as a condition for better participation. Section 1.4.2 will provide more context on the definition of epistemic humility, before addressing the latter point.

The digital world is implicated by, and has implications for humility. As established in Section 2, with the increased popularity of short-form content, our ability to practice in depth, and reflective analysis of content is reduced (Anisette and Lafreniere, 2017; Wolf and Barzillai, 2009). Braasch (2023) argues that depending on your existing levels of humility, reading on the internet can be costly, or beneficial. For example, those with a low level of humility might trust the first piece of content that aligns with their beliefs, rather than conducting further research. Whereas, those with higher humility are motivated to keep researching until they feel they have a well-rounded understanding. Furthermore, the internet has become an environment of polarised debate, where users engage in “disingenuous arguments” or “rageful expressions of hate”, demonstrating that being humble is constrained in digital life (Plaisance, 2025, p. 19). Therefore, it is important that the online space is one which does not hinder, but encourages humility.

For this and other reasons, the question around how to cultivate virtues like humility, has become a popular subject of thought amongst researchers. Kidd (2015) and DeVries et al. (2026) see

education as a key site in which humility is cultivated. More specifically, they make calls for teachers to be sources of guidance and facilitation. For example, through demonstrating humble behaviours to students directly, and curating educational materials to encourage practices of humility, students can become more familiar with using it themselves. Leary (2022) turns to social-psychology, suggesting that by discouraging overconfidence in others through social interactions such as active listening, and modelling it in public, humility has space to be nurtured. More concretely, and in relation to digital life, Plaisance (2025) makes calls for changes in the design of digital architecture. He suggests that social media platforms could design alerts which remind users to check their perspective. This can help to create more consciousness around the influence of algorithms and misinformation when we are using digital spaces. These suggestions encourage us to explore other ways we can shape digital architecture to favour epistemic humility.

Before exploring deep reading as a potential route to cultivate epistemic humility, the following section will outline the core motivation for this approach; the idea that epistemic virtues enhance civic participation.

1.4.3 Epistemic Virtues and Civic Participation

Scudder (2020, p. 1) argues that a healthy democracy depends on citizens cultivating a commitment to listening, suggesting that "a political system that facilitates and encourages sincere and careful listening among its citizens will produce more democratic decisions than one that does not". She further argues that becoming a "listening citizen" requires the civic virtues of humility and attention (p. 1). The listening citizen closely resembles Fricker's (2007) concept of the virtuous hearer, but is particularly relevant to the present research because Scudder explicitly connects these virtues to civic participation and democratic life, rather than focussing on the individual. This aligns with the epistemic rights framework adopted in this study, which understands civic participation as embedded within the exercise of epistemic rights, including through the use of DLCJ. Emphasising epistemic virtue cultivation nuances this framework by acknowledging that virtue based discrepancies exist in the quality of civic participation, thus also in epistemic practice. Epistemic rights, then, should not be understood solely in terms of access to information, but also in terms of how engagement with knowledge is conducted in virtuous

ways that contribute to the public good. This provides a basis for examining the relationship between the act of deep reading, its cultivation of humility, and the outcome of becoming a listening citizen.

The concept of citizenship has been empirically tested, to demonstrate that being a “good” or “virtuous” citizen is not just an abstract ideal but something we can evidence from exploring the lived experiences of people (Holdo, 2017; Thorson, 2012; Hooghe, 2016). Thorson (2012) found through interviews that individuals often struggle to articulate abstract concepts surrounding citizenship and civic virtues, meaning that everyday actions are not always consciously understood as forms of civic participation. Holdo’s (2017) work helps bridge this gap by translating self-reported everyday behaviours into identifiable forms of participation. In particular, he associates virtuous citizenship with practices understood as contributing to democratic health, such as community-building and engagement in public affairs. This sheds light on a positive but underacknowledged relationship between epistemic virtues and civic participation.

Evidence shows that promoting certain practices of humility produces a healthy and pluralistic social life which, amongst other things, is essential for the functioning of democracy. Specifically, research on intellectual humility showed that individuals who recognise their knowledge limitations tend to have a greater responsiveness to alternative perspectives. In particular, humility is correlated with cognitive differences related to empathy and emotional regulation, which are useful tools in managing social conflict with others (Lira & McElroy-Hetzl, 2024). Further research finds that such capacities have proven to encourage individuals to recognise any privileges and act with more sensitivity towards minority groups, potentially leading to more inclusive and collaborative communities (Singh, 2020). In the context of a highly polarised society which can fuel political tension, humility appears to be a useful trait to mitigate such circumstances.

In line with the current research, the present study understands access to, and cultivation of the virtues of attention and humility as important analytical tools which can provide greater insights into the quality of participants' exercise of epistemic rights in everyday life. It is important to note that such cultivation depends on a range of socio-environmental factors. For example,

Holdo's (2017) research found that virtuous ideals vary across different work places. Additionally, engagement with virtues is different across socio-economic status, and levels of political trust (Hooghe, 2016). Virtue cultivation therefore does not occur systematically, but emerges through the interaction of various conditions. Accordingly, the present research does not assume that DLCJ directly cultivates epistemic virtues, instead focusing on how DLCJ interacts with them.

1.4.4 Deep Reading

In Section 2, activities like political blog reading, and other cultural engagements, were found to be positively correlated with civic participation. Based on this evidence, this section will look deeper into this relationship, specifically exploring deep reading as a cultivator of epistemic virtues. Following this, reading activities can then be understood not just as a practice associated with civic participation, but with high quality civic participation or in other words, being a listening citizen.

Wolf (2018) has developed a robust discourse around digital screens' reductive influence on our ability to read deeply, in doing so, she explores the power of deep reading on our cognition, and our ability to maintain complex behaviours defined by humility. She argues that it is during deep reading where one can synthesise, and test hypotheses as part of the process of critical thinking. Without this detail afforded to us by longer-form texts, information is offered in a "gruel-thin, eye-byte serving", undermining complex knowledge formation and posing a great risk to democratic societies (p. 85).

Wong (2025) helps us to make this connection more explicit in his analysis of what deep reading looks like; careful, patient, and modest. Accordingly, this means reading text slowly and meticulously so as to understand the content, exercising will-power to control against distraction, and keeping an open mind which allows for "critical self-doubt" (p. 378). In agreement with Bombaerts et al.'s approach, Wong argues that reading in this way is a type of moral training which can nurture virtues, including both humility and attention. Carefulness, patience, and modesty are the same elements that Scudder argues are necessary for healthy civic participation,

suggesting that reading can create conditions which enable people to become “listening citizens” (Wong, 2025, p. 379).

Where Wolf and Wong divert from each other is their view of deep reading on digital devices. Wolf (2018, p. 77) is concerned that reading from a screen introduces a host of issues that are not prevalent with paper-based reading such as the habit to “cherry-pick” details as a result of the reduced visual pathway of digital pages, as well as becoming easily distracted by other features of the device. However, Wong’s biggest concern is more specifically about negative features which are designed to favour instant gratification, instead arguing technology to be a potential space to reinforce online habits such as deep reading, through alternative positive features. He proposes design solutions such as slowing down the scrolling speed to encourage people to read with more patience. In an ever-increasing digital age, this research builds on Wong’s approach to explore how to maximise the benefits of our devices, with this study posing DLCJ as a potential tool. Similarly, Hilesund (2010) argues that we need to become less dependent on paper-based texts for sustained, immersive reading. He argues that by moving this possibility onto digital platforms through solutions such as integrated reading software and design enhancements, within an optional “read-mode”, we can evolve with technology (p. 11).

Returning to the epistemic ecology, it is not just the individual's responsibility to engage in reading practices as part of virtuous citizenship, because these activities are also informed by other conditions. As Holdo (2017) suggests, political remedies to democratic deficits must be informed by virtue cultivation, ensuring citizens are afforded the opportunity to engage in practices which strengthen the quality of participation. In cases of disinformation and privacy violations, Frost-Arnold (2024) calls for the proliferation of more digital alternatives such as Mastodon. Alongside citizen activism, engaging political systems is necessary to enforce, and encourage wider social change.

This section has concluded the epistemic rights landscape in question, one which incorporates a relational view of legal rights, virtue cultivation, and civic participation. It has established within the literature, a plethora of justifications and methods to extend and strengthen how we exercise our epistemic rights; firstly through a right to attention and secondly through improved access to the cultivation of humility. Importantly, it should not be overlooked that these methods can be

considered interchangeable, namely a right to humility and access to the cultivation of attention are equally important, but this cannot all be explored within the scope of this study. The discussion throughout the literature review recognises that strong epistemic rights depend upon both individual capacities as well as the broader social, technological, and institutional conditions in which knowledge practices occur. Whilst further research is necessary to continue merging the established views into one robust epistemic framework, this current framework shapes the interview questions to grasp detail on how participants understand and evaluate the function and potential of epistemic virtues when engaging in DLCJ. This provides data to establish an exploratory and qualitative foundation for everyday epistemic rights practice.

Chapter 2: Methodology

As the scope of the present study cannot fully address the entire epistemic framework, this research focuses on exploring how the conditions of attention and humility are experienced within DLCJ spaces. It understands these conditions through the lens of epistemic rights, which provide the normative framework for interpreting how individuals engage in digital environments. By examining users' attitudes and lived experiences, it considers whether this environment supports forms of epistemic participation that may be increasingly constrained elsewhere in digital media contexts, building an understanding of what it means to have epistemic rights in reality. The main goal of this research is;

To explore how audiences exercise their epistemic rights when using DLCJ, and the extent to which these practices enable forms of civic participation relevant to democratic life. To inform this, the research asks in particular about the following questions:

1. **How do audiences evaluate the role of attention in shaping their engagement with digital content?**
2. **To what extent do audiences describe practices associated with epistemic humility, such as critical reflection and listening to others?**
3. **How do audiences of DLCJ evaluate their civic engagement?**

The research goal is empirically underexplored in the literature. Research on epistemic rights in particular is in its conception and tends to focus on contexts in which epistemic rights are violated or challenged, rather than practiced (Horowitz et al. 2024). Whilst empirical research on blogging and citizen journalism is more extensive, it has not yet been specifically explored in relation to the capacity to exercise epistemic rights, in particular, one's capacity and access to epistemic virtue cultivation. Considering epistemic practice has not yet been fully operationalised within rights discourse and media discourse, a quantitative approach would be restrictive in exploring such capacities. Instead, a qualitative interview approach allows for the nuanced exploration of how attention and humility are used, from the perspective of lived experiences of the audience (Hammarberg et al, 2016). By understanding how individuals engage with their epistemic rights in reality, one can better inform policy implementation in the digital age (Smit, 2003).

To analyse the interview data, a hybrid approach to thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews was used. Firstly, thematic analysis involves examining the data and identifying patterns following careful and repeated observation (Mwita & Mwilong, 2025). This method allows the identification of particular themes from the data which can address the research goal, and explore the issue more broadly (Maguire & Delahnut, 2017). It is useful in exploratory studies where the phenomena is not yet concrete as well as for deconstructing individuals' perspectives and experiences, both aspects being well suited to the exploration of how people experience the exercise of their epistemic rights (Mwita & Mwilong, 2025).

Whilst thematic analysis of interviews provides rich and insightful information on the current study, there remains some broader limitations which might impact the validity of the study. Thematic analysis relies on coding the data set, often line by line, and presenting the list of generated codes to search for patterns (Vaismoradi et al, 2016). This process has been argued to lack objectivity and be dependent on the interpretation of one researcher, which can reduce validity, thus must incur a rigorous or systematic dimension through using a 'codebook' (Roberts et al, 2019). Codebook thematic analysis aims to improve the validity and replicability of thematic analysis by bridging it together with quantitative analysis and creating a rigorous system producing codes, using multiple trained coders.

However, such a rigorous process is not deemed manageable or necessary for this study. Firstly, as this research is a masters thesis, it was unlikely to have two coders complete the process. Secondly, the subjectivity of the researcher has elsewhere been argued to be integral to the process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Coding itself can be an organic process where the researcher becomes more familiar with the data after repeated immersion. The results are neither wrong nor right, nor do they seek to retrieve something objectively waiting to be found in the data. Instead it is a product of the researcher, their knowledge and grasp of the theory, and the intersection of this with the data (Braun et al., 2019). In this case, such a combination seeks to provide fresh empirical grounding for an emerging discourse on which additional research can develop from, thus it is better suited towards a flexible, and reflexive form of thematic analysis.

To gather participants, the social media and newsletter platform Substack was utilised, with users of the app being contacted privately. Substack is a privately owned media application where users can engage in long-form citizen written articles, both through writing themselves, and reading articles written by other users. Substack is used by around 20 million individuals from across the world. Whilst Substack functions as a subscription-based platform, only 3 million of these users are paying subscribers, with the majority of long-form articles accessible for free (Meneses & Escalonilla, 2025). Substack has transformed the nature of journalism by allowing both professionals and enthusiasts a chance to re-interpret mainstream news cycles, or uncover their own stories and share information with a community (Hurcombe, 2024; Rachmad, 2023). Substack primarily functions by producing content similar to blogs and newsletters, being a hub for long-form content (The Trend Feed, 2024).

To ensure that the data from the interviews was able to capture the depth of the participants' experiences and insights, the strategies suggested by Mwita (2022) were employed. Firstly, a pilot study was conducted to test the interview questions and uncover any potential challenges of the process. As a result of the pilot, questions which were not understood or produced weak insights were removed from the script. Furthermore, the pilot studies allowed time for

understanding how to build rapport with the participant, and make them feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

Secondly, the research had to obtain a sound sample size. The final number of interviews conducted following the pilot realised a sample size of 12 participants. This allowed for enough data to make sense of patterns and themes without producing an unmanageable amount for one researcher to analyse (Mwita, 2022). Qualitative interview data more generally produces a smaller sample size, thus it is difficult to generalise the results beyond such a small sample size (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, the pool of participants recruited was geographically diverse, meaning the results are not bound to one social context, and has increased range (Robinson, 2014). Ensuring the participants were from a variety of locations better represents the citizenship of a global online space.

Thirdly, the selection of the participants had to be tailored to the research goal in order to inform meaningful results (Mwita, 2022). Therefore, users were contacted only if they demonstrated themselves to be active users who are consistently engaged in DLCJ. This was determined by contacting users who frequently commented, shared, or interacted with *Substack* articles. Active users were found directly from left-wing progressive media pages on *Substack*. The decision to focus on a particular ideological readership was to ensure more uniform data. As Veenstra (2014) argues in his own blog research, it is important to measure blog readerships separately across liberal and conservative divides because the attitudes and consumption practices of the readers will vary in these contexts, and a mixed sample could lead to inconsistent and difficult to manage results. As a result of these decisions, it must be acknowledged that the findings relate not to DLCJ readers in general, but specifically to an active and progressive-left readership.

Through this selection process, the participants who ultimately engaged with the research were determined by the Substack pages known to myself as a researcher, as well as influenced by the chance that the approached Substack users would be interested enough to respond to the invitation to partake. This latter point further suggests that the participants are active users, rather than ordinary users. In the resulting sample 6 participants identified as male, and 5 as female. Participants were based in the United Kingdom (n = 4), the United States (n = 3), the

Netherlands (n = 2), India (n = 1), and Nigeria (n = 1). The sample included participants from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Black African, Black British, British Asian, Filipino, Punjabi, White American, White Dutch, White British and Yoruba. Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis to protect participants' identities.

In the initial contact message, participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the research, including the necessity for an online and recorded video or voice call. Here, they were asked for consent for the audio to be recorded, later this consent was verbally obtained during the introduction of the call itself. Participation was completely voluntary, and all participants were informed of their right to withdraw their data from the research up to two weeks beyond the interview, after which data could no longer be removed due to analysis. Before the interview began, participants were reminded that there was no requirement to answer any or all questions, especially if they felt uncomfortable at any point. All transcripts were saved on Google Docs with the interviewees names replaced with pseudonyms in all drafts and the final thesis. The audio recordings are automatically deleted by Microsoft Teams after a default period of 120 days, taking their availability up to the grading of the thesis.

Remaining consistent with the flexible design of the research method, the interviews were semi-structured. This means a script of questions were prepared in advance, however, during the interview there was room to discuss insights beyond these questions depending on the experiences of the participant, this meant each conversation was different (Mwita, 2022). Because the exercise of epistemic rights is a fluid concept that participants may not be explicitly familiar with but will subconsciously practice day-to-day, it was important that the questions captured detail that a survey or a rigid closed structure can struggle to obtain. Semi-structured interviews mitigate this by allowing the researcher to probe participants on certain topics that they may not recall, or otherwise omit if they do not perceive it as relevant (Adams, 2010). The questions themselves were informed by the literature review and the resulting research questions to ensure the interview aligned with the addressed theoretical framework on epistemic rights (Mwita, 2022).

Once the interviews were complete the thematic analysis process could begin, and this largely followed the seven-step guide outlined by Mwita & Mwilongo (2025), including familiarisation, generating codes, searching for and refining themes, and identifying significant quotations. Because the research questions specifically engage in the complex notions of epistemic virtues – humility and attention – it was important that these themes could be deducted from the data during the coding process, whilst simultaneously allowing new themes to emerge from the data through inductive coding, as it is still an underexplored topic (Fereday, 2006). This hybrid deductive-inductive approach to thematic analysis provides flexibility when mapping patterns across the dataset, whilst also ensuring the data answers the research questions.

Step 1: Familiarisation of collected data. Much of the familiarisation with the data occurred the the initial interview process as they were conducted by myself. During this process I was able to get a broad understanding of the experiences of each participant. The audio from the interviews were recorded, and the subsequent transcription process then allowed me to have a more intimate perception of the data, and spot patterns that went unnoticed during the actual discussion. As Bird (2005) maintains, transcription is a crucial step in familiarising oneself with the data as it enhances the researchers experience with emerging patterns and insights from the participants.

Step 2: Creating initial codes. This step is important to turn details from the transcriptions into simplified pieces of meaning (Mwita & Mwilongo, 2025). After embedding the trasncriptions in Microsoft Word, I used the 'comments' feature to make notes and detailed codes of the data line-by-line. Seeking for codes line-by-line allows you to detect more detail which chunk coding - coding by sentence or paragraph - might omit (Mishra & Dey, 2022). Whilst going through the transcripts for the first time, I used a mix of these coding approaches, sometimes coding words, or lines, but also in chunks to ensure I was interpreting layers of semantic, and latent meaning within the participants responses (Braun et al., 2019). Initially, I had 843 individual codes derived from the data. I ensured to refine these initial open codes into 291 succinct, and more focussed codes through a second level of analysis and removal of duplicates (Mishra & Dey, 2022). Conducting multiple rounds of coding, at different times, allowed me to analyse the data from new perspectives allowing different codes and meanings to emerge from the data.

Step 3: Searching for themes from codes. In defining themes, the goal is to combine different codes into larger overarching descriptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme is considered to be something which captures an important mechanism in the data, in particular it "answers the research question in a meaningful way" (Scharp & Sanders, 2018, p.1). The process of generating themes from the data began during the coding process itself. Through coding the data, returning to it, and assessing it again, I began to notice which patterns were occurring in alignment with the research questions and began to make notes in the Excel spreadsheet of potential themes a code could belong to. When I finished my coding, I had collated 13 themes, including sub themes.

Steps 4 and 5: Reviewing and defining themes. I noticed my initial themes were derived from my familiarity with the literature review and the research questions, so when reviewing them, I adopted a data-driven approach to ensure my subjectivity was not influencing the formation of rigid themes already understood in the literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Whilst it is suggested that to mitigate this issue, the researcher could conduct the literature review after the data collection, this would have been more risky for a first time researcher (Braun et al., 2019). Instead, I endeavoured to remain conscious of the issue through continuous self-organisation of the themes, going back and forth between the data and the codes. A thematic map was built in the form of a spreadsheet using 'filters' and 'highlights' to help me track the progress. This was an ongoing process, which required a level of reflexivity and patience to induce meaning from the data and the codes.

Furthermore, the data began to present variation in insights across participants, but also within individual participant data where there was a level of incoherence in one's attitudes and experiences of certain epistemic practice. Accordingly, I made sure that my theme titles explained the fluctuation, rather than simply stating the topic (Mishra & Dey, 2022). For example, what was a theme based on "The Civic Ecosystem" was better explained as "Divergent Civic Orientations". Providing such detail in theme definitions is important to show that the researcher uses a level of creativity to present a story that is socially innovative, and can relay more nuanced practice (Braun & Clarke*,* 2022). Through this process many of the specific subthemes could then be tied together under a main theme which better trace the participants'

various, and sometimes fragmented, epistemic practices. Eventually, this narrowed down to a set of defined three main themes, each with three to four subthemes.

Step 6: Identification of the most significant quotations. Throughout the different stages of coding and defining themes, I highlighted quotations which seemed to best illustrate the emerging themes within the Excel sheet. It was useful to conduct this during the data-analysis and before the final write-up because I was better immersed within the data at the time, meaning the quotations were likely to carry significance according to the themes I was detecting (Mwita & Mwilongo, 2025).

Step 7: Writing up. The final phase brought together the established quotations and overarching themes with the existing literature in direct answer to each research question. Firstly, the themes were described and illustrated amongst stand-out quotations in an objective presentation of the data. Following this, the data was interpreted and analysed in more detail. During this latter part, the literature established in the review was placed in parallel, and divergences and convergences were sought. In addition to this, new literature was sourced to address emerging issues which were not initially considered or discussed, but proved to be useful in answering the research questions. The writing up phase ensured participants anonymity through the use of pseudoanonymisation.

Chapter 3: Results

The results section objectively reports the main findings of the data, based on the themes derived from the coding and subsequent analysis. The three themes recurring in the data, and relevant to the research questions are; *1) The Management of Attention in Accessing Conditions for Deep Reading; 2) Negotiated Humility; 3) Divergent Civic Orientations.* Each theme contains subthemes which support the analysis of the results by demonstrating the existing variations and nuances. Detailed interpretation of the results will be discussed in Chapter 4.

(Full interview guide and transcripts are presented in Appendix A & B).

3.1 The Management of Attention in Accessing Conditions for Deep Reading

Participants frequently described practices of managing their attention in a fast-paced digital environment. DLCJ was generally perceived as an enjoyable tool which participants utilised as part of their attention management. They described various ways in which it offered the conditions for deep reading. Additionally, perceived internal and external factors which interfered with, or helped to sustain their focus were raised. This theme has been divided accordingly into 1.1) Attention Training; 1.2) Enjoyment, Connection & Writing Style; and 1.3) Technological Control vs. User Agency.

3.1.1 Attention Training.

Participants consistently expressed ways in which they engaged in strengthening their attention capacity through DLCJ. When describing their reading behaviours, often illustrated was the requirement for effort, whether that be removing distractions, reading articles multiple times, or utilising audio features to ensure they can maintain focus. For example, Jaden noted that;

> *I'll say, OK, that looks like a really good article. I really want to read that properly. And I will try to make sure there's no other distraction. So rather than having music on at the same time or the radio on, or something going on in the background, I will just sit down... and take my time and read through it.*

Seamus explained how he would listen to articles using a Substack feature in order to improve his attention; *"this is why I have to go and listen to things like three, four times, 3000 words, 4000 words plus, because I'm not interested in surface level knowledge."*

Readers often shared concerns that our attention capacities have reduced overtime, and referred to short form content for playing a part in this rapid consumption. Jaden reflected on the change he noticed from when they were younger;

> *Sitting down and reading something for two hours or listening to an album was something that people did very easily and I could do very easily. I now find that I have to make a conscious effort every day to find the time to sit down and read things properly.*

Alongside these observations, readers demonstrated a high level of commitment and desire to counteract their attention-related concerns, regularly putting it into practice. This also was said to occur outside of digital DLCJ, for example by reading books, magazines, or newspapers. Nonetheless, most participants engaged consistently in reading digital DLCJ across a range from a daily to weekly basis. Often these attention practices were associated with a desire to obtain and understand knowledge; Crystal relays about shallower, shorter content, *"something that's designed really to get my attention, but doesn't go very far in terms of exploring the ins and outs of something... doesn't really make me think very much."*

Furthermore, the participants demonstrated excellent recall of the long-form content they consumed, with many being able to recite details of the dates, title, structure and sentiment of the articles which they were referring to. However, this did not apply to everyone, with some struggling to remember the last articles they read, or as Mary put it, only being able to recall *"the general gist"*.

Overall, participants were conscious of their ability to pay attention, and were actively seeking ways to strengthen it through reading long-form articles as often as possible, alongside other reading endeavours.

3.1.2 Enjoyment, Connection & Writing Style.

For attention and focus to be facilitated, participants expressed a need for long-form articles to elicit an emotional or physical response. Often they described how experiencing, enjoyment, laughter, or "*getting lost*" (Abena) in an article allowed them to continue reading it. Not only, did the enjoyment have to be related to happiness, but also respondents were stimulated by intellectual enjoyment;

> *This creator named Jimena, she writes about... eco-Marxism or more philosophical writing. And her work is beautiful, but it's also quite, you know, dense. I find myself really glued to that screen, even though objectively it's talking about philosophy and it's very long.* (Mary)

Escapism was also a factor in paying attention. Some readers declared their preference for articles which allow them to forget about the real world, favouring narrative and story-telling. Ramiro explained his reason when questioned about what he spends more time reading,

> *There was a time in the past when I came upon an article on Substack pertaining to American politics… somehow I didn't appreciate it, because Substack for me... is an app where I try to go into my mind. Like, I already live in a chaotic world.*

On multiple occasions, participants mentioned that the intimacy between the author and the reader helped to support this emotional or physical attentive response. Some participants were able to remember the names of particular writers, whose work they read on a regular basis. Others noted articles they enjoyed by attributing it to the writer's craft and skill. This author-reader *"relationship"*, As Seamus described it, was highlighted as a distinct part of DLCJ, which essentially created a sense of being *"closer"* (Seamus) to the content. Mary described this clearly; *"you can see a lot more of the artistry, not necessarily just in the writing, but in the research, in the analysis, in the editing, in the voice that comes through with long form."* More specifically, someone associated this unique relationship with an ability to be privy to knowledge that may be otherwise unattended to; *"Elif Shafak is my go-to person for musings around literature, around things happening in the world, around little things that people don't really pay so much attention to."* (Ramiro).

Building on this idea of voice, writing quality and style was also raised as important to the readers, each of them having different preferences. Mary enjoyed *"silly"*, unusual topics which made her laugh, Abena enjoyed learning about the cultures from her birth country, Tanzania, and Adam enjoyed reading from academics who offered an alternative educational tone. In general

though, participants had a preference for an informal style of writing. Many compared DLCJ to traditional media forms, flagging the reduction of *"jargon"*, and the independence of the authors on Substack as maintaining their interest. As such, Substack was perceived as "refreshing" (Mary) and differing from other media sources.

With regards to length of writing, Isha felt that some articles *"drag on"*, and could be condensed into fewer words, however, the majority of participants had a natural affinity for longer-pieces and enjoyed this format of reading; as Mary said, *"I do love a good long form."*

Overall, participants were not willing to just read anything. Instead, there were various factors which supported or hindered them in managing their attention. Often the content, style, writer perceptions were noted as interfering factors. Of course, the detail of each factor varied per participant.

3.1.3 Technological Control vs. User Agency

In this subtheme, attention is expressed by participants not just in terms of time spent on an article, but also in terms of where participants' attention is directed. For example, attention includes whom and what they are engaging with on Substack. The majority of participants recognised the platform, and its algorithm, as a determinant of this. A few participants suggested that Substack enhances and supports attention, for example, Ramiro, expressed his agreement with a particular Substack feature;

> *If you are unable to finish [an article] in one sitting, [Substack] will let you know how far you have gone by stating the percentage. And if you complete reading it, it will let you know and it will mark the article as read. A wonderful feature.*

However, there was not agreement with this opinion, with others feeling the ever-changing design of the app increasingly contributed to distraction;

> *Before [it was] very simple. You publish a newsletter, I'll read it, or I'll ignore it, and I'll come back. But now, I think there's just so many different bits of information that are distracting people. It's hard for them to just focus on why they came in the first place, which was to read a writer. (Seamus)*

Two participants agreed that Substack, the platform and its governance, are limited in its abilities. Mary felt that Substack was not doing anything *"particularly remarkable"* to redirect users attention to particular articles and authors. This view was corroborated by Seamus who stated that big writers like *"Margaret Atwood… [are] sapping up all the oxygen"*, and that Substack is *"not doing that job well enough",* referring to its discovery tools.

Alternatively, many participants expressed that they possess a level of autonomy themselves, regarding what they read and when they read. Participants felt that ultimately, they get to decide whether or not they choose to read something, and whether or not they subscribe to a writer; as Sally claimed *"you could either read it or don't read it",* and Rita stated *"you don't necessarily have to engage if you don't want to".*

Notably, individual participants would offer these opposing viewpoints within the same breadth. This recurred across multiple participants. Firstly, Sally initially stated the power of the algorithm, *"remember our algorithm knows us better than we know ourselves"*. Later in the discussion she expressed that individual autonomy determines our digital use, *"it's how you choose to use it [Substack]. The type of person that you are will definitely dictate the type of person you are online."*

Furthermore, Mary experienced this crossover in the same moment as she described her experience finding Substack articles as one which is curated by the algorithm but also by personal decision making;

> *Substack does give me... people from similar backgrounds to mine. I think that's because of the algorithm. So I haven't necessarily had to... reach across the platform to... engage*

with somebody. The other thing is you obviously choose who... you subscribe to, you choose who you read.

Overall, in relation to our capacity to pay attention and to direct our attention, participants illustrated perceptions which gave heed to both the powers of technology, as well as of the individual.

3.2 Negotiated Humility

Respondents frequently recalled practices of humility which included, reflection, critical-thinking, and engaging in a plurality of voices. There was a strong level of commitment to the values related to humility, however, this humility was not absolute. Participants would negotiate their humility based on particular ethical, intellectual and moral boundaries of self. This theme is divided into; 2.1) Critical Thinking and Fact-Checking; 2.2) Listening to and Acceptance of Others; 2.3) Self-Confidence and Control; and 2.4) Trust.

3.2.1 Critical Thinking and Fact-Checking.

There was a frequent description that DLCJ was used to aid participants' thinking, as Sally described the process as one which is *"refining"* her *"point of view"*. Crystal argued that being able to *"come up with your own opinion without the input of anyone else is... a really important skill"*. Isha and Crystal demonstrated how the long format itself gave her the detail and time needed to develop a coherent thought. For Isha this was on the topic of quieter listening bars as an alternative to loud music venues;

My first reaction… I was like, don't really like that. But then by the end of it, and upon further reflection, I was like, I understand the value of listening bars for people who find the club too intense.

Often, respondents saw evidence as valuable, seeking to check facts when reading DLCJ. As Crystal said, *"I don't really read one's without a reference list"*. Additionally, Rita stated, *"I*

really started getting into the habit of like, if I came across something that I was not aware of... I would do a quick Google check".

Participants demonstrated a level of critical awareness of both the content they read, as well as their own thinking. For example, Seamus noted that when he does research on an article he likes to "*build cultural references... that aren't really elaborated on in pieces. I'll go off it… and find out what that means and I'll come back".* Additionally, a few participants described how they read the comments section of an article within Substack to reflect on the topic and understand what others thought about, or gained from reading it. Crystal described this in detail, noting the difference between Substack and other social media platforms;

> *I really enjoy reading everyone else's opinions on the same topic and seeing people also be critical about what this is saying. And the comment section on Substack feels way kinder with more nuanced, in-depth answers than for example, on Instagram.* (Crystal).

In recognising the context of the app, Mary said *"I'm not completely blind to the fact that Substack is a form of social media. It is an algorithm. And you see a curated feed as well".* Showing self-critique, Jaden stated that *"I'm well aware that I carry my own biases".*

Most participants described careful efforts when engaging in long-form content to enhance this critical awareness. This meant conducting extra research when they did not understand something, questioning the limits of their own knowledge, reflecting on articles after reading them, and seeking out alternative perspectives. For example;

> *I think the only thing is... when I read things I... take it quite literally in the beginning, and I'm trying to be more careful and think critically about what people are saying online because it is not fact and I shouldn't take it as fact.* (Crystal)

At the same time, a few respondents recognised the limits of their capacity to be critical. As Seamus said regarding the seeking of counter-narratives to balance particular articles, *"I try and do that as much as possible. I'm human like everybody else, so I'm not able to do it every time".*

Generally, there was a high level of reporting critical thinking and reflection. Whether it was simply a desire to pratcie, or more concretely a common practice, respondents spoke consciously about the importance of remaining aware of bias and seeking facts.

3.2.2 Listening to and Acceptance of Others.

Readers expressed that something they liked about Substack was the range of content and ideas that they can find there, describing it as a diverse platform of DLCJ. Participants described articles written from within their own countries, such as India, Nigeria and the UK. In particular, a couple respondents noted they enjoyed reading from outside their home countries, with Ramiro mentioning; *"here are people from across the globe, Substack does not limit me to the people in my country only and I get to read from diverse people from different races, people from different climes".* Topics described included AI, child mortality, gender divides, music, and birds. As Abena stated; *"there's such a huge range of things that you're able to read from... the economy, to politics, to love and relationships".*

Respondents described a level of empathy and curiosity to hear from others. In particular, Abena felt that reading long-form articles was very valuable because it allows the reader to, *"experience this person's perception of the place and [even though] you're not able to physically exist in someone else's body... I feel like it's the only way, for me, that you truly step into someone else's shoes".*

At the same time, there was a level of patience illustrated when listening to other people's opinions that were different from their own. For example Seamus said "*I don't want to close the door on these people because it's democratic at heart and I want people to have a chance to publish what they want to... that platform".* In agreement, Mary described how she often comes across people in the comments section with disagreeing perspectives, her response is *"that's super fine.... If they approach it from a nice way, we can have... a nice conversation about it so I can explain my position."*

Importantly when listening to others, occasionally participants relayed how this resulted in a perspective or belief change. Rita described initially, she primarily thought positively about AI and used it to help her with her assignments but felt it was important that she learned more, so she subscribed to a range of Substack writers focussing on AI. Eventually she noted that she has *"oscillated between blindly trusting AI to absolutely hating it, he [Substack Author] helps me find a nice middle ground to look at both sides."*

Demonstrating an even stronger shift in belief, Jaden described how digital DLCJ led him to switch his political party affiliation in the UK;

> *I recently changed my political affiliation based on what I read there [Substack]. So taking on board what people say... I've moved my affiliation to the Green Party. I don't think I'd have done that if I hadn't been able to read some considered views and actually spend time thinking about it and looking at some of the detail.*

Overall, participants described many instances of connecting to a plurality of voices on DLCJ and a curiosity to do so.

3.2.3 Self-Confidence and Control.

Simultaneously to the empathy and patience described, the same participants showed ethical and moral boundaries regarding their listening and engagement, specifically on ideological terms. Multiple participants cited their disdain, and subsequent lack of interaction with newsletters which promote agendas framed as *"right-wing"* or *"misogynist"*. As Mary stated;

> *I realised last week that... Andrew Tate was on the [Substack trending] list. So there is that kind of very disgusting and abhorrent giving [of] a platform to these… individuals who espouse these really disgusting ideas. For the most part, I don't interact.*

To add to this, Sally stated; *"I'm gay and progressive, I never subscribed to any of the conservative right-wing publications"*.

Instead, multiple participants described how they enjoyed reading digital long-form content that aligned with their own values and explained how they intentionally shaped their engagement in such a way. When Mary spoke about which articles she shared on her account, she noted that she only shares those she thinks have value;

> *If I read it and I... don't necessarily feel like this is kind of the image I want to share with my audience or... this is necessarily the view I would feel comfortable with my audience engaging with, I won't.*

Others admitted to having a preference for articles that exist within their remit of understanding and interest. Crystal claimed about her reading habits, *"I don't go too far out of what I can understand"*. This was corroborated by Zak who said he mostly reads from *"Grace Blakely, [or] people that are sort of aligned with my political views."*, and Abena who stated, *"I find that maybe I've made a bubble on Substack where I do mostly see things that I can resonate with"*.

In some responses, participants illustrated a sense of confidence in their own personal knowledge. In such cases, they described how they are well read, and understand topics easily. In particular, Sally said; *"I'm not fat, slow or stupid. Because I read Slavoj Žižek as well, and I read one of his books a long time ago... and then I studied literature at school and read everybody, everything"*.

Other participants differentiated their own reading and intellectual habits online to others'. In one case, Rita expressed her concerns;

> *You know, I think I forget that people don't have critical thinking skills or they like to voice their opinion before educating themselves on things and I think… that is so different for me because what I'm used to is first you read upon it and then you form your own opinion after.*

Crystal explained that she would not share all articles, in particular one she read about Japanese culture, with her friends as she felt;

> *It would be hard for them to grasp because they already have an opinion about how much they like Japan. The article was... about convenience culture and the sexualisation online. They wouldn't be in denial, but I think I would have to over explain what this means.*

The responses showed that readers executed a level of control over the information they consume and share, often based on their belief system which leads them to prefer some knowledge bases over others.

3.2.4 Trust.

When reading DLCJ, multiple participants expressed how they have to rely on instinct and trust to assess the credibility of an article. For example, Seamus expressed that *"you have to take some of it, I think, on trust. I guess part of the thing that guides me is they're [the author] on Substack anyway".* Mary agreed that her similar trusting approach *"has done well for me".*

Seamus spoke candidly about his limited capacity to reliably consume knowledge using long-form content, meaning that trust is imperative. Firstly, he argued it is not possible to know everything; *"an author can say... this is who I am, and this is what I think, and this is what I do, but I don't really have any way of checking that with any depth".* In more detail, he explained;

> *I'm going to take it at face value, because it's hard not to. There's only a little bit of amount of time in the day and every single time I read an article, I can't then spend 2 hours researching; who is this person?*

Some participants described the importance of relationship building between writers and readers, in which the reader develops assumptions. Mary explained this regarding all media; *"I think in a similar way that I have relationships to different legacy media outlets. I have different*

relationships to certain Substack creators and certain levels of trust". When Ramiro was asked about how he trusts the articles he engages with, he explained his assessment,

> *Because it's a long post, it means that the author most likely considered all sides to the topic that they wrote about. People sharing long form posts on Substack, to the best of my appraisal... pay attention to this a lot, which helps readers to connect with what they are saying.*

Overall, readers felt that trust was an important part of reading DLCJ, especially in the absence of critical reflection and fact-checking capacities.

3.3 Divergent Civic Orientations

Participants evaluated the relationship between using DLCJ and civic engagement inconsistently. Using DLCJ was perceived as a primarily personal initiative for the participants. However, they also acknowledged in different ways that DLCJ can have impacts beyond the individual. Generally, participants seemed to have a concern and care for society, yet this was not directly translated into their online behaviours and attitudes. Thus, this theme is described in 3 subthemes 3.1) Focus on Personal Growth; 3.2) Concern for Society; and 3.3) Active Civic Participation.

3.3.1 Focus on Personal Growth.

When asked about why they use DLCJ apps, some respondents' initial intentions were about sharing their own stories. For example, Zak*, "saw it as a sort of a gateway... to sort of talk about what I did in the Air Force".*

Often participants described their use of DLCJ in terms of self-expression and self-growth, noting how reading can help them with their own thoughts. Crystal relayed how she was so busy with other activities, that if she was to spend valuable time reading on Substack, it must have

personal benefits, she stated *"I don't want to waste it on reading something that I don't think is going to... help me or have a positive impact on me or my thoughts"*.

When Ramiro was asked if he feels a sense of responsibility for others when sharing and reading long-form content, he said he did but added using long-form is also *"out of personal need"*. Mary pointed out that nobody in her real life even knows she posts on Substack, framing it as a private practice. When asked about the broader value of paying attention to long-form articles, most participants opted to refer to themselves, for example Ramiro described how *"long-form articles teaches you patience, perseverance [and] moderates your dopamine"*.

Often, reading articles was described as introspective. Isha explained that many articles she reads are about descriptions of personal experiences and this bombardment of self-analysis began to overwhelm her *"I think I just got to the point where I was like, I need to stop thinking about myself as much"*. Alternatively, for Ramiro, this introspection was useful;

> *The things I learn from reading these articles on Substack, they are in my subconsciousness. They answer questions, they connect dots, lines that have been strained somehow in my mind and… [are] causing some level of maybe unhappiness... and I'm a better person for it.*

Another thing that recurred in the interviews was the framing of Substack as a professional space that can support individual business endeavours. It was described as another way for the *"hustle and grind"* (Sally), and Mary recalled a journalism conference about how to best utilise Substack for growth. When Seamus was asked if he wanted to add anything of importance to the discussion regarding how people engage with information online, he spoke about the power of format in writers being heard, he stated that;

> *The journalist of the future is going to be someone that knows how to be a journalist, but also knows how to be a content creator, ... the axis of those two is really your best hope, I think, of building a sustainable career as someone that is journalistic.*

At some point, all the participants described the purposes and impacts of Substack in terms of individual growth.

3.3.2 Concern for Society.

Amongst participants many described their concerns about fragmented communities, polarisation, and our attention spans. On attention, Ramiro suggested that if you were to ask anybody one thing they would change, then he believed a lot of people would *"talk about distraction. Distraction is a big deal in our world today"*. In terms of community, when asked to share anything of particular interest, Jaden raised that;

> *There's so much available online and so much you can get access to in your own home, that it probably does work against... community, against people spending as much time with each other as they used to, against people having... proper conversations with each other.*

As well, participants described a feeling of hope when reflecting on reading long-form content. Jaden followed up his concerns by stating *"I think that's one of the strengths of something like Substack and I have to be honest to say it gives me a bit of hope",* and Sally also felt that the value in paying attention to longer-form articles, was that *"it gives you hope"*.

In addition to aforementioned examples of how reading and knowledge circulation has an impact on the self, the impact it has on others was also acknowledged by some participants. Crystal thought about how her sharing and reading of articles is not an isolated activity; "*I think it's important for me to reflect after so that I'm not spreading misinformation when I go to talk to my friends about it later on".* Furthermore, Crystal envisioned how reading habits have a wider impact, "*I think the world could definitely be a much better place if people were immersing themselves in content like this and thinking critically about it".* Also, Seamus praised long-form content over short-form, for its potential social impact;

> *If we're really going to have any depth of understanding and acquire any kind of real wisdom that's going to help us to understand how the world is moving right now and how we can relate to one another, it's just not going to happen from [a] quick 300 words.*

These excerpts highlight that some participants were able to comprehend how DLCJ is socially embedded, representing a general sense of concern for others amongst these readers.

3.3.3 Active Civic Participation.

Beyond general social concern, a few others went further in their descriptions of how they used DLCJ in ways which represent forms of active civic engagement, both online and offline.

Online civic engagement was most common. Respondents often described how they would not only read articles, but write their own, comment on other people's articles, and share articles within the digital space. For example, Ramiro claimed *"I comment, I love commenting, to be honest… I definitely want to share my thoughts about it"*.

Others described different scenarios of building connections, or friendships with people online, through DLCJ. In some cases, respondents would connect with a writer whose article resonated with them, and then continue to engage in each other's content. Mary explained that,

> *I find I do have… friends on Substack now… it is very important… to have those relationships, I found that a lot of people are quite genuine because… my little corner of Substack draws a lot of people who are… very interested in the same subjects.*

These connections with strangers online were described as valuable by Isha, *"[I] feel really like seen or like affirmed… to know that someone else has experienced similar things to me… even if you don't know them".* Although, it is important to note that these friendships were not always maintained. In two separate cases where someone described befriending someone through DLCJ, both respondents also described how they lost touch with them.

In many other cases, people would use their already existing friendships and social lives to share articles they read on Substack, and circulate knowledge. Ramiro spoke of this practice as one which has an impact, he will *"share out the article because I believe completely, that if the person I'm sharing the article to [will] read the article like I did, they will be better for it"*. For Rita, she described sharing articles with her friends as successful knowledge circulation, and connection building;

> *They're going to tell me they're going to read it later. And most of them actually do end up reading it later. And then, coming back to me and being like, okay, I read that article and here's what I think… I'm not texting my friends largely in emojis anymore. I'm talking to them. And I think that's… so great.*

However, participants described limits to sharing articles as online civic engagement, it being only as frequent as the article is deemed relevant to their friends or family. Respondents often shared articles with people they perceived would be interested, and avoided sharing anything with those perceived not to be. For example, Zak explained *"I'll send some people stuff. My old coworker recently, I think he's probably more inclined because he's curious. But mostly, I found a lot of people are just not engaged"*.

In some cases, respondents would also use DLCJ as a tool for offline civic engagement and knowledge sharing, but these instances were described less frequently. Casual discussions about previously read long-form articles were said to occur at work with colleagues, or at home with family.

Beyond this, Seamus and Mary were the only participants to mention an offline act of concrete community building as a result of using DLCJ. Whilst Mary attended a Substack related journalism conference, Seamus formed a *"Substack London Writers Group"* alongside a few others;

> *Neither of these two ladies had organised writers groups before… but everyone was kind of starting from the same position. We were there... it was like a support group. We just*

> *were there to listen to each other's perspectives on writing and why we had started those Substacks. And then that momentum built and built for like 3, 4 sessions after that. I think we would meet once every three months, two months. And some of those relationships would develop online.*

Seamus did admit that these relationships have faded, and he has stopped attending the Writers Group, due to becoming busy with external matters.

Overall, participants framed the translation between DLCJ and civic engagement through descriptions of both online and offline engagement practices. However, where it was most cited was in the online space.

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Key Findings

This study aims to address empirical gaps in an emerging discourse on epistemic rights, using data which provides insights into the lived experience of those exercising such rights within the technological context of DLCJ. Firstly, the results suggest that use of DLCJ, by a progressive-left readership, meets the three conditions necessary for deep reading, *patience, carefulness, and modesty*, justifying DLCJ to be an epistemically productive site which supports the exercise of epistemic rights, albeit unevenly (Wong, 2025). Overall, there is an indication that these practices are constantly negotiated and influenced by a range of socio-technological factors, in which DLCJ itself can be both inhibiting and enhancing. Importantly, participants' evaluation of epistemic rights primarily concerned individual needs over the collective needs of civil society. This chapter provides a reflection of the data in response to each of the three research questions, including the implications of the results, and a discussion of the study's limitations which must be considered alongside the findings.

4.2 Audience evaluation of the role of attention in shaping their engagement with digital content

Participants demonstrated a determination to train their attention capacities, and approach DLCJ articles meticulously. This is understood in their acknowledgement of distractions, and their reading processes which often involve multiple attempts and critical engagement with the content. These results regarding attention align practices of *patience* and *carefulness*, offering strong evidence that DLCJ provides the necessary conditions for deep reading, as laid out by Wong (2025). Therefore, DLCJ can be framed not just as a site to exercise epistemic rights, but more positively as a potential epistemic tool for enabling listening citizens (Scudder, 2020).

Participants evaluated attention as fundamental to their engagement with knowledge and the digital space. By describing their desire to sit down, focus, and remove distractions so they can pay attention to long-form content they established both a concern for their attention, and the importance to improve it as a method for knowledge attainment. These results build on existing evidence concerning the presence of a detrimental attention economy, as well as psychological research which notes the structural changes the internet has on the brain, highlighting the social relevance of our waning attention (Seaver, 2023; Loh & Kanai, 2016).

The data showed how memory plays an important role in knowledge formation. The interview questions frequently challenged participants to recall DLCJ articles which they have read in order to describe their experiences. Many participants were able to recall articles in great detail, suggesting their reading activities enabled the information from the article to be committed as knowledge into their memories. This suggests that deep reading improves cognitive and attention capacities. Furthermore, it has implications for civic engagement; if readers obtain more knowledge on particular topics through reading, they have more context to use in engagement with civic activities (Wong, 2025).

Other participants struggled to recall details, showing that even when readers pay attention to online information, not all of it becomes memorable knowledge. This complicates the role of attention in society as a mediated rather than a direct pathway to knowledge acquisition (Fortney, 2025; Bombaerts et al., 2026). Participants specific recall, or lack thereof highlights how there is

so much information, and people are so busy, thus not all epistemic practice is concerned with genuine affect, and there is a filter in terms of what has value and what does not. This finding contributes to a detailed understanding of the epistemic ecology, and its many variables which influence our civic participation indicating how further research on epistemic rights and strengthening attention capacities should consider the role of memory. It is consistent with Mahr & Csibra's (2018) framework which evidences the key role episodic memory plays in justifying and communicating beliefs, and therefore is part of epistemic processes.

The data suggests that DLCJ readers primarily understand attention as an individual and agentic responsibility, reflected in their emphasis on self-discipline, and attention training, Participants' consistently offered descriptions of these autonomous reading habits, illustrating their emphasis on the self to manage attention. In contrast to scholarship on the attention economy, participants rarely connected their own behaviours to broader structures of power (Seaver, 2023; Mariani, 2025). This disconnect may reflect a feeling of apathy and powerlessness against these powerful structures and a resulting reliance on the self. Furthermore, it could be attributed to a lack of conceptual language for understanding attention as a site of economic extraction, and embedded in systems of power. Therefore, the developing discourse on epistemic rights and the right to attention is important for challenging corporate power and providing a conceptual framework through which everyday users can articulate their compromised right to epistemic activity (Nieminen, 2014; Fortney, 2025). Framing attention as a common epistemic good may further help address this by providing a language through which attention can be understood as a shared concern rather than a private resource (Belgroun et al., 2025).

Simultaneously, participants sometimes would acknowledge the influence of broader technological factors, such as platform design and algorithmic curation, which shape and direct their attention, revealing a degree of ambivalence in participants' understandings of their autonomy over their attention. This can be better explained by a bi-directional approach on what influences attention, with moderating factors being determined by both technological features and social factors, rather than being attested to one (Postmes & Baym, 2005). Under this view, DLCJ remains influential in supporting epistemic practice whilst simultaneously operating within existing social norms.

Finally, participant data stressed the importance of enjoyment and writing quality in where they direct attention on DLCJ. This emphasis on enjoyment may also indicate that participants do not explicitly account for the role of social media competition, algorithmic curation, and commercial pressures in shaping their content selection (Thrall et al., 2014). Participants frequently reported reading articles on leisure and culture, more specifically music and travel, topics often visible alongside commercial and market ecosystems. Participants interpreted their reading preferences in terms of personal enjoyment, suggesting that enjoyment may be shaped and intertwined with market needs within capitalist media space. This association can marginalise other topics such as minority rights or politics. This can be interpreted through the theory of the third-person effect in which one believes they are less influenced by the media than other people, in this case assuming they pay attention simply because they enjoy something (Davison, 1983). As such, technology serves as a vessel for covert powers that limit the extent to which audiences can knowingly exercise their epistemic rights.

Taken narrowly, this finding about enjoyment offers a useful contribution to a broader literature which often perceives epistemic rights within macro-conditions such as political systems and socio-technical environments. The relationship discovered between enjoyment and reading DLCJ, suggests that readers were more likely to exercise their epistemic rights if they had a pleasurable emotional or physical response to the content. Boyask et al.'s (2022) research into children's enjoyment of reading similarly concludes that a decline in reading achievement is reinforced by educational policies which isolate reading from social and emotional engagement. This is a reminder that enhancing epistemic rights is not just a matter for wider structures of power, but needs to be assessed on a micro-level too, one which emphasises the varying emotional factors which influence our attention. More practically, participants' desire for enjoyment implies that DLCJ online is more beneficial for epistemic productivity if it is written with readers' enjoyment in mind. This data suggests that exploring the relationship between enjoyment and the exercise of epistemic rights will have fruitful implications for the epistemic rights discourse.

Overall, in answer to the first research question, participants were conscious of and concerned by the topic of attention and knowledge acquisition to the extent it bled into their online behaviour. Whilst there was a disconnect between their own attention behaviours and the systems these operate within, the interviews offered additional insights into everyday understandings of attention, encompassing virtue cultivation, enjoyment, and memory. This informs the wider research goal by illustrating that DLCJ creates some conditions for users to practice their attention, an example of exercising their epistemic rights. However, this practice is influenced by a range of factors, such as lack of recall and personal interest, which can both interfere and enhance epistemic capacity, some of which require further investigation within the broader discourse. Finally, the data has practical implications insofar as it reveals the desires of digital users and can be used to inform the design of new digital platforms which engage attention better, resulting in a stronger capacity to exercise epistemic rights.

4.3 Audiences description of practices associated with epistemic humility, such as critical reflection and listening to others

Participants described a consciousness, desire, and effort for thinking critically about the articles they read, and find time to fact-check information as much as possible. There is no evidence to suggest that DLCJ is the cause of this humility, instead it is likely the readers have a prior understanding of how to handle information with humility. This can be implied from their expression of reading enjoyment outside of their DLCJ use. Nonetheless, this demonstration of "critical self-doubt", and consideration of the facts aligns with Wong's (2025, p. 378) third and final condition for deep reading; *modesty*, as well as the condition of *carefulness*. Because participants' evaluation of DLCJ meets all three of Wong's criteria, even if no causal relationship with humility is apparent, the data shows DLCJ facilitates a level of deep reading which is argued to enhance humility.

Furthermore, the citizen journalism element of Substack aligned with participants' clear level of interest and desire to connect with writers from a plurality of backgrounds, offering a range of information. In comparison to legacy media, where the author often goes unrecognised, Substack authors were frequently cited by the participants, suggesting that the point of perspective acts as a key characteristic of reader engagement. Participants were also keen to keep DLCJ an open,

and democratic space which allows everyone's voices to be heard, again showing humility. This was expressed in their diplomatic descriptions of their view on others' opinions, even one's they disagree with. These findings show a negative correlation with current trends of polarisation existing online, meaning DLCJ may operate in a different way to other social media and news spaces, encouraging greater humility.

The key difference in DLCJ in comparison to other social media outlets, is not its independence from journalistic codes, or its citizen voice, but its detail oriented conditions where audiences are encouraged to spend time reading through a particular topic. As some participants even noted, it was when they got to the end of an article or they were able to reflect on a large quantity of information, that they were able to broaden their perspective. DLCJ then provides a space where users can trace the logic of others, which is unique.

Furthermore, a review of various comments section analyses showed that the most frequent topic of study was incivility in the comments section of news media (Alafwan et al., 2023). However, on Substack participants described their use of the comment section for shaping an informed opinion, further exemplifying DLCJ to be a unique form of social media. Readers described it as a more empathetic, and open space, where opinions are developed. Others' perspectives of primary articles were considered a valuable source of knowledge to participants. This highlights how, in an oversaturated information landscape, the reality of epistemic development involves situated and imperfect forms of deliberation rather than equal access to a single body of objective information (Nieminen, 2024). Overall, this suggests that epistemic rights should include a positive obligation to support epistemic humility and the productive conditions in which users engage with information.

The most significant expression of epistemic humility in the data was participants' reported willingness to change their views in response to others. Although this occurred less frequently than the basic willingness to engage with and listen to alternative perspectives, it nevertheless indicates the potential for DLCJ to facilitate more reflective and revisable forms of belief formation. The power of deep-reading is affirmed by the fact one participant attributed the complexity of DLCJ articles to his change in political party affiliation. Overall, this finding

strengthens the argument that DLCJ readers both engage in and are exposed to forms of epistemic humility within their reading practices.

The strong sense of humility amongst participants was otherwise negotiated within particular boundaries. Firstly, participants were able to recognise the limits of their capacity for humility by explaining that they cannot fact-check every article, or be critical of each source. This reflects the reality of everyday life in which constant reflection and analysis of information is not feasible, nor productive. Research on humility amongst political leaders has shown that it can have detrimental effects such as emotional exhaustion, and family conflict (Yang et al., 2019). Importantly, humility should not be understood as an entirely positive or unlimited virtue, but as a practice that should involve balance. This finding illustrates that epistemic humility is a limited capacity in everyday life, shaped by the practical conditions in which individuals engage with information. It contends that whilst DLCJ encourages epistemic practices of reflection it does not automatically produce ideal epistemic citizens who constantly verify and revise their beliefs. Instead, the exercise of epistemic rights is relationally dependent on individual capacities, platform conditions, and wider social contexts, thus cannot be strengthened by digital tools alone.

In light of the realistic capacity of humility, participants often relied on trust when handling knowledge on DLCJ. They made assumptions that authors and articles could be trusted based on app credibility, the effort of writing long-form, and a sense of relationship-building. This process operates in parallel to processes of critical thinking and fact-checking, replacing humility when it is not active. It suggests that readers can claim to engage in critical reflection when in reality this is overshadowed by trust. It raises an important question about the role of trust in humility. Dormandy (2020) argues that epistemic trust operates alongside humility as a process in effectively securing knowledge. She suggests that humility enables individuals to trust others, but also to assess trustworthiness effectively. This would suggest that readers' assumption of credibility in knowledge acquisition is not rash, but grounded in their humility. However, Dormandy explains that the two operate independently, meaning trust can be exercised without humility resulting in gullibility. The data cannot distinguish whether readers are blindly trusting, or effectively trusting, leaving questions around the extent to which humility is supported by

DLCJ. Considering DLCJ's access to detail and open discussion, and participants' efforts to remain critical, a strong case can be made to agree with Dormandy's first analysis that participants' trust and humility exist in tandem.

Furthermore, there was a sense of confidence in their own intellectual habits. Readers affirmed their knowledge claims as well-founded, and in some cases made comparisons to the weaker epistemic practice of others. This illustrates the tension between reading, which facilitates the development of informed citizens with effective judgement, and the practice of humility, which can be perceived as reduced confidence in one's knowledge. Perhaps it is unreasonable to demand that individuals who are committed to virtuous epistemic practices, also remain in constant self-doubt. Pritchard's (2018) definition of humility, describes this nuance by pointing out that whilst there is a fine balance between self-confidence and self-doubt**,** it is possible for both to exist simultaneously. The key aspect of humility is not recognising the limits of your own knowledge, but the willingness to respect the knowledge of others, and be genuinely willing to listen. It is true that participants displayed a willingness to listen to others, however, as follows this was also met by a boundary.

Participants' ethical boundaries played a role in the extent of their capacity to act with humility. They stated a clear rejection for hostility against minority groups, which in turn encouraged them to read articles which better aligned with their values, and to avoid interaction with views that undermined their values. Whilst there was no evidence of interaction with hateful comments, participants portrayed a level of calm and patience to hostility in which polarisation was not exacerbated, but kept out of sight. It reinforces the earlier claim that DLCJ provides a non-friction space for knowledge circulation, but at the same time is embedded within trends of ideological polarisation in society, encouraging echo chambers and a weakened opportunity for reconciliation (Barberá, 2021).

Overall, audiences described practices of humility in depth which evidences an association between DLCJ and virtuous epistemic practice. DLCJ does not remove limitations on humility but it does provide users with the space to enact their critical thinking in a constrained environment. When humility is active within DLCJ it contributes to forms of epistemic

engagement characterised by knowledge sharing, exposure to a plurality of voices, and supportive dialogue.

4.4 Audience evaluation of their civic participation

When asked about why and how they use DLCJ, participants acknowledged their concern for society and for others in various yet subtle ways. This can be derived from their willingness to retrain their attention based on social concern, their openness to hearing from diverse cultural backgrounds, and their empathy for alternative opinions. More explicitly, participants had a sense of hope for society, they expressed a desire for their actions to have a positive impact on their friends, or for paying attention to help aid community building. Despite this acknowledgement for social change, their actual experiences favoured their individual identity over their identity as a social being. For example, when people were asked about the broader value of attention, answers often derived from a personal angle, where paying attention was not perceived as a tool to alleviate human suffering, but to benefit self-growth (Bombaerts et al., 2026). Therefore, participants evaluated their role in epistemic practice as a relatively personal matter with occasional nods to broader society, representing a divergence in the civic orientation of the self.

Considering this perception of self was detected amongst all participants, there is a likelihood that this attitude is informed by the broader system with which they are embedded in. For example, DLCJ was envisioned as a tool for business growth on multiple occasions. Also, participants used it to impact their own thoughts, or become better people. This logic aligns with the values within a neo-liberal system, such as profit motivation and private property, rather than an ecological system which can encourage stronger networks of care (Bombaerts et al., 2026). Bettache (2024, p. 1) argues that the broader economic system can enforce “cultural syndromes” which prioritise an individualistic mindset. As such, participants' divergence suggests that a desire to have concern for society at large is overshadowed by the economic system, forcing them to renegotiate and adapt the purpose of their epistemic practice. Having a structurally influenced and narrow perspective of citizenship might in turn limit DLCJ users’ capacity to improve their civic participation.

Corroborating Holdo's (2017) aforementioned study in which participants struggled to articulate their everyday practices as a form of citizenship, the participants of this study were engaging in civic participation despite not perceiving it as such. The reported avenues DLCJ offered for civic participation existed at varying levels, most commonly being private and momentary experiences. The fact that participants were commenting on DLCJ posts, building new friendships, resharing posts with friends, discussing posts in-person, and simply reading and evaluating other people's social commentary all constitute a form of civic participation. This is because these activities are informing their everyday understanding of life, influencing their relationships, and shaping their perspective on socially relevant topics such as AI, or the environment. This could be understood in terms of "monitorial citizenship" in which people gather information and build a repertoire of personally and locally relevant knowledge to later hold power to account (Graeff, 2019). More broadly, it signifies a casual form of citizen participation where digital users' self-education and engagement with knowledge can lay the foundations for longer-term democratic impact (Nieminen, 2024; Staudinger, 2017; Hoggan-Kloubert et al., 2023).

Less frequently noted by participants, but still in occurrence were forms of visible civic participation which were rooted in DLCJ use, then went beyond the screen and involved an element of collective organising, like that of attention activism. That this experience was only described once throughout the interviews has broader implications for debates around the influence of digital participation on social movements, an interesting topic not within the scope of this thesis. In regards to the research question, it strengthens the claim that DLCJ users do not perceive themselves as epistemic activists, or epistemically social beings, but as introspective learners and knowledge seekers. This finding has broader implications for how society can most effectively exercise epistemic rights, raising questions over the conditions of DLCJ for future research; do these conditions isolate epistemically virtuous individuals from tangible social change, or engage them in more subtle ways?

The divergence in civic orientations demonstrated amongst readers of DLCJ suggests a limited ability to articulate or recognise the existence of an epistemic ecology in everyday practice. Whilst DLCJ may support epistemic virtue cultivation and enable varying forms of civic

participation, readers rarely positioned themselves as active civic participants. Instead, participants often framed the exercise of epistemic rights through an individualised understanding of the self. This orientation may limit the civic potential of epistemic rights; if epistemic agents do not relate their knowledge practices to wider social life, opportunities for collaborative knowledge production and collective epistemic engagement become reduced.

4.5 Limitations and wrap-up

As the results consist of participants' self-reported expressions and attitudes they are only indicative, rather than definitive, of understanding how progressive-left DLCJ audiences exercise their epistemic rights. When sharing experiences towards humility and being attentive, it is not guaranteed that this mirrors their actual epistemic practice in day-to-day life. Instead, the data provides insight into participants' epistemic orientations and expectations, helping to establish the boundaries and conditions through which epistemic rights are understood and exercised in practice. Given that the field of epistemic rights is emerging, and the concept is not widely recognised or institutionalised, the findings contribute empirical depth to what has largely been developed as a theoretical framework.

The participants were recruited through the Substack app, thus the data is mostly in reference to this app, meaning the data cannot be generalisable to other digital platforms or epistemic contexts. Although they may indicate patterns that are likely to be present in systems with similar structural features such as the app *Medium*, which operates in a similar format. It is not within the scope of this research to explore how epistemic rights are understood generally, but specifically in the context of DLCJ. This focus is justified by the distinctive characteristics of DLCJ which emphasise length and citizen-generated content, making it a productive site for exploring the virtues of attention and humility in contribution to the epistemic rights framework.

Furthermore, this thesis did not include a separate analysis of Substack's design, ownership, or governance structures. Such an analysis could have provided valuable contextual depth for interpreting the interview data, particularly given that platform design emerged as a recurring theme in participants' accounts of attention and content engagement. A more detailed examination of the platform's technological affordances would therefore have enabled further

understanding of how users exercise their epistemic rights. However, this was not feasible within the time and word-count constraints of the study. Future research would benefit from a focus on platform analysis and epistemic practice to better situate the technical conditions of epistemic rights.

Finally, the research participants are all embedded within a similar, progressive-left ideological background. As addressed earlier, Veenstra (2014) stresses the importance of blog analysis to remain within ideological lines in order to keep the data controlled and consistent. Whilst, this means the results are not generalisable to all readers of DLCJ, it provides a much needed empirical basis to continue building on in the epistemic rights discourse.

The results have formed a consistent depiction of how DLCJ readers evaluate and express their epistemic rights as uneven. It has highlighted the relevance of epistemic virtue cultivation in everyday practice, and illustrated how these are negotiated in relation to a range of factors and contexts, including but not limited to platform design, cognitive constraints, and social norms. A key takeaway from the results is that whilst deep reading and citizen journalism can contribute to the maintaining of virtuous practices of epistemic humility and attention, this does not exist absolutely, and is not consistently translated into explicit forms of civic participation from the perspective of participants. Instead, epistemic rights are primarily framed and exercised as tools for individual reflection and self-development.

Conclusion

Through a qualitative analysis of progressive-left DLCJ users' experiences and attitudes towards epistemic practice, this research has examined the boundaries within which epistemic rights are enacted and understood within the realities of digital life. Firstly, the findings suggest that epistemic rights are understood as a set of everyday practices rather than operating as abstract democratic tools. Secondly, the extent to which epistemic rights could be exercised are shaped by various contexts; platform affordances, cognitive limits, and broader socio-technical conditions. Thirdly, the civic significance of epistemic practice is under-realised by users themselves, who preferred epistemic introspection to epistemic activism. Within these conditions, users neither

perceived themselves as entitled to stronger epistemic opportunities, nor considered their epistemic behaviours entirely a matter of personal will.

The role that DLCJ plays within the epistemic rights framework is in some ways enhancive. The findings highlight how DLCJ is used to access a level of deep reading which enables critical, in-depth encounters and interpretations of knowledge. Therefore, the conditions of DLCJ should not be isolated from wider discussions of reading as supportive of educational and democratic advancement. It provides a beneficial and contemporary alternative to traditional reading in the digital age, and should be included in future discourse. Furthermore, the knowledge found on DLCJ comes from a range of citizen-led sources, encompassing cultural, intellectual and political diversity. Within this format, participants consistently described practices of attention and humility as active knowledge seeking behaviours when using DLCJ. Accordingly, DLCJ offers the conditions which can sustain epistemic virtues.

However, the interaction between individuals and DLCJ remains uneven. DLCJ does not sustain wholly virtuous practice and the civic outcomes are influenced by various socio-technological constraints showing how access to epistemic rights is constrained. Namely, attention and humility are both negotiated conditions that do not occur absolutely. Whilst users acknowledge their desire to be attentive and humble, the reality is that they do not have the capacity to implement such behaviours all the time. Digital epistemic potentials and limitations were at times verbally acknowledged by the users, whilst simultaneously appearing critically underexplored and understood in their practice. Overall, epistemic rights exist when using DLCJ to the extent that they support the maintaining of existing epistemic virtues, but they do not entirely remove the socio-technological limitations that weaken them. This key finding emphasises the value of an ecological and relational approach to epistemic practice, which should always consider the ubiquity of epistemic rights.

Users' constant struggle in their engagement with epistemic goods on DLCJ, illustrates the importance of building societal protections from epistemic harms. There is no guarantee that knowledge can be obtained and remembered from using DLCJ, additionally there is no guarantee that the knowledge obtained is credible, or encompasses a plural reality. As such, there is real

risk of epistemic harms regularly being produced online. For example, if users do not have control over their attention nor the capacity to know how best to use their attention, then users can epistemically harm both themselves, and potential speakers of knowledge.

The rich data from the interviews illuminated the conceptual boundaries upon which epistemic rights are perceived. DLCJ audiences exercise epistemic rights primarily as individual liberties, enhancing their knowledge and virtues as part of their self-development. This finding is in line with the neo-liberal systems they are embedded in, suggesting the strong influence social structures have on epistemic practice. More subtly, their exercise of epistemic rights does pertain to a level of concern for civil society. This is illustrated in the data through their article choices, their willingness to engage with alternative perspectives, their knowledge sharing, and the virtuous attitudes they are sustaining through their practice. Both these motivations together shape how users manage and interpret knowledge, and engage with others. As such, DLCJ users are acting as listening citizens although they do not articulate themselves this way, which may in turn inhibit the depth of their civic participation.

The findings strengthened the valuable distinction between freedom of expression and epistemic rights. Whilst readers seemed to freely hold and express their opinions, they were engaged in covert epistemic practices which more intricately determined subtle social outcomes. Essentially, if the users' activity on DLCJ was observed through the lens of freedom of expression, it would seem that their democratic freedoms were highly functioning; their ability to share information, and formulate their own opinions would be apparent. However, through the lens of epistemic rights this observation is greatly complicated. Instead, users' interaction with knowledge online, their ability to inform themselves, and build credible understandings of the world are often negotiated within the available affordances. This implies that epistemic rights terminology is useful when understanding online engagement with knowledge and the social implications it can have. Essentially, epistemic rights explain the conceptual limits on the realities of our freedom of expression.

It should be noted that this thesis focussed on humility and attention as derivations of effective epistemic practice. The findings suggested that individuals engage in various other forms of

online engagement, including trust and enjoyment, aligning with the idea that the epistemic concept is ubiquitous and socially embedded. These emerging conditions also inform epistemic practice and are no less important for understanding how users exercise their epistemic rights in everyday life. Considering they are less prevalent in the emerging literature, future research may benefit from incorporating additional epistemic practices into their analysis. Additionally, the generalisability of the results may be limited in scope by being based on self-reported behaviour of a particular ideological group of online users. Future research could explore alternative ideological groups to contribute to a broader picture of the manifestation of epistemic rights. Despite the study's narrow focus, by providing first-hand and descriptive insights into the micro-realities of the theory, empirical gaps are filled, flagging some of the epistemic access that is already available, and how certain individuals evaluate their role as epistemic agents.

Overall, this study fleshes out a digital epistemic rights framework that should continue to be developed alongside four interconnected dimensions; protection from harms, virtue cultivation, interfering socio-technical conditions, and the civic orientations of individuals. By exploring different contexts of epistemic rights according to these factors we can continue to uncover the extent to which knowledge is negotiated in everyday life, and better understand the wider ramifications this may have.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Topic	Script
Part 1: Welcome	Hello and thank you for taking the time to be a part of this research. The purpose of my research is to understand how people practice knowledge circulation in these environments, and what implications this can have for democracy and participation. Please keep in mind that the questions are primarily in reference to long-form articles, such as those you find on Substack.
Part 2: Consent	I will be recording the audio of the interview which will be used for the purposes of the research only, your data will be pseudo-anonymised. Do you consent to this?
Part 3: Warm Up	Can you tell me a bit more about how often you use Substack, and also where else you read information related to social and political issues? - *Prompt: Are there other platforms you like which are similar to Substack?* *Why did you choose to download or use Substack in the first place?*
Part 4: Long-form Citizen Journalism	How would you describe Substack to someone who hasn't used it? - *Prompt: Is it different from other platforms you use, like news apps or social media?* What role do you think Substack plays, for you personally or more broadly? - *Prompt: Are you happy with what the app offers you?*
Part 5: Epistemic Practice	Can you remember the last article you read and how you engaged with it - did you question it, accept it, or something else? - *Prompt: Do you remember who wrote it? How might it have helped you afterwards?*

	Can you tell me about your experience when you find something difficult to read, for example it might be a new topic? How have you dealt with this in the past? - *Prompt: Do you feel you have to inquire further into the subject?* In the last month, can you think of a time where you came across a perspective on Substack which is different to what you usually engage with?
Part 6: Epistemic Capacity	Can you remember the last article you read and how you engaged with it - did you question it, accept it, or something else? - *Prompt: Do you remember who wrote it? How might it have helped you afterwards?* Can you tell me about your experience when you find something difficult to read, for example it might be a new topic? How have you dealt with this in the past? - *Prompt: Do you feel you have to inquire further into the subject?* In the last month, can you think of a time where you came across a perspective on Substack which is different to what you usually engage with? Can you tell me about your experiences actively engaging with Substack articles online (commenting, messaging, sharing). Do you feel this engagement has any impact on others? Also, any times where you used something from a Substack article offline? - *Prompt: Where does offline engagement happen?* Do you feel it is easy or difficult to build informed opinions *when using Substack?* What factors might influence this? - *Prompt: your own habits, the platforms you use, or something else?*
Part 7: Final Questions	More broadly, what do you think the value is of paying attention to a longer article? Do you feel any sense of responsibility when it comes to what you read or share with others? Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is important in relation to how you read, think about, or engage with information online?

Part 8: Demographics	Age? Where were you born, and where do you live now? How would you describe your ethnicity? How would you describe your gender?
Part 9: Outro	Thank you so much for your time, and I hope you felt like you gained something from talking about this topic. I will happily share with you the final research paper once it is finished. Goodbye.

Appendix B: Interview Transcripts

Appendix B.1: Interview with Sally
13 April 2026, 03:12pm
43m 24s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

Interviewer 0:03
Okay.

Sally 0:05
Yes.

Interviewer 0:05
I think is that started? Sorry.
Audio recording and transcription started. Okay, so yeah, if you can just quickly confirm again that you're happy for me to record the audio, which will be used for the purposes just of the research.

Sally 0:22so
Yes, I agree to having this interview be used for research purposes.

Interviewer 0:30
Thank you. And do you have any questions before I start with the interview?

Sally 0:35
No, none.

Interviewer 0:37
Great. So feel free if you want to go slightly off track. It's not like a super structured interview, but I'll just speak through the questions and we can see where the discussion goes.

Sally 0:46
Okay, no problem.

Interviewer 0:48
So the first question is just a simple one. Can you tell me a bit more about how you use Substack and if you get information about social political issues from other platforms as well?

Sally 1:00
Yeah, before Substack, I was using a medium.
And I like that magazine format of anything. I've been buying magazines since I was a teenager and I love the magazine format because it gives you...

Interviewer 1:08
Yeah.

Sally 1:24
quite a bit of everything so that you are never like reading about one topic. And for somebody like myself who works in as a creative, I like that different topics are covered.

Interviewer 1:42
Mm.

Sally 1:43
I have been a subscriber to Conde Nast for as long as I can, whether it was GQ, Vogue, Vanity Fair, The New Yorker, and all the legacy titles that they carry. When everything started going online, I discovered Medium.
And there was some good writers there that I liked whose work resonated with me, helped me understand or formulate my own thoughts when it came to

Interviewer 2:07
Room.

Sally 2:25
Things moving online, as well as culture, not style so much, because it was more about culture and...

Interviewer 2:28
Yeah.

Sally 2:37
other things, politics and stuff like that. So I've always looked for somewhere online, as I say, that has a cross-section of ideas that are developed.

Interviewer 2:40
Mhm.

Sally 2:56
And, because I read extensively myself.
It was just another means of having another viewpoint.

Interviewer 3:09
Yeah, OK.

Sally 3:09
Of course, because I'm gay and progressive.
I never subscribed to any of the conservative right-wing publications or anything of the sort that has a leaning of that. I mean, I keep wanting to cancel my New York Times subscription, but the fashion and style sector

Interviewer 3:22
Mhm.

Sally 3:34
are quite important for what I do in my work.

Interviewer 3:39
Yeah, I get that.

Sally 3:40
So when Substack came up, I think I joined it probably.

As soon as I saw it, I started reading others. I can't remember who was the first person I saw, whether it was Hanif Qureshi.

Interviewer 3:48
Mhm.

Sally 3:58
I can't remember who was the first person that I saw, so I've been at Substack since it started, and eventually I too will write. It's just that...

Interviewer 3:58
Mm.

Sally 4:11
I think there are so many better writers out there than I am.
that I will use it for creating content with regards to fashion, but not in a writing format. And that's why I like Substack. It offers that opportunity to

Interviewer 4:31
Right.
To practise writing.

Sally 4:39
Do it different yet. Personalise it and use different mediums to communicate how you feel.

Interviewer 4:41
Yeah.
And do you feel like on Substack specifically you're able to get a range of perspectives from different writers that you can't get elsewhere?

Sally 4:56
Yeah, absolutely, definitely. I mean, a couple of my friends were on it, and Professor Andrew Groves, I've had him on panels that I've hosted, and you know, so that, yes, I do find some, because...
It is a portal for writers.
Who have been pushed out of legacy media?

Interviewer 5:27
Mm.

Sally 5:27
or who no longer align with the values that the places they once worked at are now subscribed to. Because, I mean, I kind of think that's an important factor right now.
And Subsac does not.
Sensor, it allows you to write and find your audience, find your voice.
any which way you choose. So that level of autonomy and of course,

Interviewer 6:02
Mm.

Sally 6:08
Some people have been able to make a living off of it, because it's just another means of the hustle and grind.

Interviewer 6:17
Mm.

Sally 6:19
That culture.
To which we are all now subscribed, you know, because...
Of tech.
having eroded the notion of a 9 to 5. In the early days, we all thought, oh yeah, this is exciting. But you kind, everybody has realised now we are plugged in 24 7 and there is no lecture.
Up.

Interviewer 6:54
Yeah.

Sally 6:55
There absolutely is no let up. And the hustle culture, the grind culture means it works brilliantly as well if you can.

Interviewer 6:56
So.

Sally 7:13
diversify. It's literally become now this thing where you've got to diversify your portfolio of activities and try and monetize everything as possible. You have influencers who monetize their waking up

Interviewer 7:25
Hmm.
Room.

Sally 7:33
Their morning routine, influencers who monetize their lunchtime routine, their workout routine, so it, it, it, it.
It.
It's the culture in which we live now and substack for the moment.
I always think it reminds me of Vanity Fair, when Tina Brown was the editor, and of course the last days of Brayden Carter.

Interviewer 7:59
Mm.

Sally 8:03
Two editors who I sort of totally enjoyed their vision.

Interviewer 8:11
Yeah. Great. And on a more like personal note, when you're reading these articles, the way you engage with them, are you questioning what they're saying or do you tend to agree with it or how do you basically approach the reading process?

Sally 8:28
It's the thing about it, I have critical thinking, so I read things for knowledge and entertainment to support my own theories. I'm an oversharer, so friends, all my friends constantly complain.
You know, that's a print you send me all these things, but there's no way I can read all of that because I spend my Sundays just reading.

Interviewer 9:00
And you like sharing them with your friends?

Sally 9:02
Yeah, I do, I do, because more often than not.
It's a means of us when we get together, we can discuss something. That's what you do when you get together with friends. We discuss ideas, thoughts, whatever it is. And the meeting with Substack, you can find, because I haven't been...

Interviewer 9:14
Mm.

Sally 9:28
exploring. There's only one guy I've been reading his reviews on music because I have friends who DJ, we all go out clubbing and stuff like that. But for me, my thing is culture and how culture impacts fashion and the way we consume it today.

Interviewer 9:47
Mm.

Sally 9:49
I also worked at a magazine, ID Magazine, so I've always liked magazines and having had the opportunity to have worked at several magazines now, it's something I still enjoy.

Interviewer 9:53
Yeah, another one.
And do you feel those discussions that you have with your friends, do they have an impact like longer term? Do you feel that they can guide your friendships and the communities that you live in?

Sally 10:16
Oh yeah, definitely. You're friends with, you're always going to be friends with whose values, people with whose values align with yours. Right? So there is no way

Interviewer 10:31
Room.

Sally 10:35
I hope within my friend circle I will have anybody supporting what's going on in Gaza. I will not have anyone who is a supporter of Trump or Keir Starmer because we gravitate towards people whose
Politics will drew, we share.

Interviewer 11:00
Yeah, definitely. And when it comes to, like, back to the reading of the articles, when you are engaging, not offline, but online, like maybe through comments or messages, do you feel this has the same impact as when you're discussing with your friends in real life?

Sally 11:18
No, I just sort of, I don't comment. As I say, everybody.

Interviewer 11:21
Again.

Sally 11:23
I'm not one of those people who's going to leave like a long rambling comment at all. I just don't like that. I try to leave an emoji. I re-post it with an emoji that I think resonates.

Interviewer 11:30
Mm.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Sally 11:43
to the tone of the article and how I feel. If I repost something without an emoji, it's because it's fine, there's nothing more for me to say. I really, and I don't know, I don't know if it's because...

Interviewer 11:47
Yeah.

Sally 12:00
I have access and I have a platform that I don't want to abuse it. Because the people who, you know,
Just make comments, ad nauseum, paragraphs long. It's like, you know, don't you have someone with whom you could discuss this with?

Interviewer 12:25
Mm.

Sally 12:27
I am not that close. Yeah, I mean, I was with a friend on Saturday night and, you know, we were talking until about 3 in the morning, you know, so that I have spaces where I do that. For me, it's not about me grandstanding by leaving.

Interviewer 12:27
Yeah, I think it's not useful.

Sally 12:47
pithy comments or anything of the sort. Those people are grandstanding, the people who need a hug, in my opinion. So for me, because it's one person's point of view, right? And you could either read it or don't read it. So I will never.

Interviewer 12:49
Mmh.
Yeah.

Sally 13:09
Post something that's derogatory or negative.

Interviewer 13:14
Mhm.

Sally 13:14
I have the choice to choose who to read and who not to read.

Interviewer 13:19
Yeah.

Sally 13:19
I am not going to censor anyone or belittle anyone, you know, when they articulate, because it takes a lot to write and to write well.

Interviewer 13:35
Mhm.

Sally 13:35
and I know it's something that I am yet unable to do. So I admire people who are able to write and write well and provides me with a great deal of enjoyment and food for thought.

Interviewer 13:52
Yeah, and the articles that you choose to read that you find fruitful, do you ever find maybe that they might be too complex or there's things that you don't understand? And can you remember a time where this has happened and how do you deal with not always knowing what they're talking about?

Sally 14:08

If.
Well, like, I'm not fat.
Slow or stupid, I mean, because I read Slavo Zizek as well, and he, I read one of his books a long time ago, and so I don't think, and then I studied literature at school and read everybody, everything.

Interviewer 14:22
Yeah.

Sally 14:35
So, nothing I ever find.

Interviewer 14:35
Do you feel quite confident?

Sally 14:38
Complex.

Interviewer 14:40
Mm.

Sally 14:40
All, and in fact, even when it is challenging.
What will be challenging is the concepts, but good writing.
Never is never a struggle. It's always so beautifully laid out that the simplest of people, if you are willing.
to let go and let the mind wander. You can grasp the concepts. I mean, I mean, Slavoz Zizek is about the Olympus who I can think whose work.
can be deemed challenging. There was another guy who has been doing psychology, Peter George, and I think it is, and he was going on about Lacan, because everybody, we're going through this phase right now.
where the whole philosophy of some of the contemporary philosophers like Lacon is the one that keeps cropping up in lots of people's discussions. So no, I don't find, if you know,

Interviewer 15:50
Mhm.

Sally 15:57
Because, I mean, you know what was David Foster Wallace is challenging, right? He is challenging because he's a wanker, right? Doing things, as I always thought.

Interviewer 16:03
Yeah.

Sally 16:11
Then on Cree's famished rd was a bit of a wank fest, and it was appreciated. I met one African woman who said she thought it was brilliant.
But...
You know, and I read Gabriel Garcia Marquez; I read, I read them all, but, and again, I think, or Beno Cree's book.

Interviewer 16:29
Gaia.

Sally 16:41
Was left me disenfranchised because I am.
Are a former slave, my ancestors are former slaves, so I was cut off from understanding my heritage, right? And he...

Interviewer 16:51
Mm.
What was that? Who was the author for that? Sorry.

Sally 17:05
Bed on Cree Famished Road, I think it was called.

Interviewer 17:08
Mm.
And so you were saying that reading that.

Sally 17:14
Yeah.

Interviewer 17:15
Cut you off from understanding history, yeah.

Sally 17:16
Yeah, completely, completely, because of my lack of understanding of African.
African culture.
Most important.

Interviewer 17:29
And so, I guess in essence, you're kind of explaining that.
over time, you've practised and developed certain habits that enable you to understand and have a capacity to read a wide depth of things. You also feel like there are other factors in having this ability to form your own opinions.

Sally 17:45
Yes.

Interviewer 17:53
that aren't just about your habits, but are related to the technology perhaps, or something else.

Sally 17:59
Yes, yes.
I mean, and we were talking about, I mean, that was the only book in my life that I, that rankles, it still bothers me to this day.

Interviewer 18:03
Can you think of a specific example?

Sally 18:15
That I found it difficult, and then of course I subsequently met Ben or Cree.
And I understood.
his personality, because he's never written another book since, you know, so it's a lot of personal animus I think I'm expressing here.

Interviewer 18:31
Mm.
Mm.

Sally 18:39
But I do maintain.
If he was a good writer.
More people would have grasped that book.
And he would have written more.

Interviewer 18:56
Yeah.

Sally 18:57
Not just that one book.

Interviewer 19:00
Yeah.
And taking it back to Substack articles, when you're reading them, do you tend to finish them in terms of your like attention when you're on your phone especially? Do you finish them in one sitting or like the longer ones or do you find it

Sally 19:06
Yes.
No, I finished up. No, yeah, yeah. I mean, as I say, I spend Sundays reading.

Interviewer 19:21
Like the format on the screen is...

Sally 19:28
I read a lot during the week. I'll grab an article here, an article there. I mean, because...
I do a lot of.
Talking.
Hosting fashion content, so I'm always looking for new ways of...

Interviewer 19:45
Mm.

Sally 19:51
Getting a wider audience interested in fashion.

Interviewer 19:56
Mm.

Sally 19:56
Let's just put it that way to explain it, and to give myself an original idea when it comes to the ideas of fashion.
Right, does that make sense?

Interviewer 20:11
Yeah, that makes sense.
Um, and...

Sally 20:17
So no, so to answer your question, no, I kind of go through them in one sitting. I don't speed read, you know, but I read and because I enjoy reading, I read it once I start an article.

Interviewer 20:18
When it comes.
Yeah.

Sally 20:37
I finish it because there will be that nagging thing in my head that I didn't finish it.

Interviewer 20:39
At once.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Sally 20:46
You know, so that's it, I don't know if it's an accomplishment. I never feel an accomplishment because I just enjoy reading.

Interviewer 20:55
For sure. So do you think that when you're in these moments where you are giving your full attention to an article, does it have like a particular effect on you that's meaningful? Like how can that benefit you?

Sally 21:07
The person who does that for me is the woman who writes on fragrance, Michelle.

Interviewer 21:13
Mm.

Sally 21:15
She is the best, most evocative, because even I think she's even better than Patrick Susskind, who wrote Perfume, because her concept knowledge of fragrance, I don't, I think I've shared.

Interviewer 21:27
Mm.

Sally 21:34

Articles most, because I have friends who are writers as well, poets.
So I share that with her. I have a little friend who's an actress and she writes as well. And you know, a couple of people have said, Sabrina, thanks for sharing because I love that woman's work. She's the best thing I think on Substack.

Interviewer 21:56
Yeah.

Sally 21:57
I really, really, really think so the way she describes scent, because...
I listen to lots of interviews.
By done given by musicians, because oral and scent are two incredibly nebulous senses.

Interviewer 22:22
Mm.

Sally 22:22
Right, to describe it, to have a universal translation, for me, is just like, wow.
So that this woman, Miss Shelly from Substack, absolutely adore her work, adore her work.

Interviewer 22:45
And have you ever like reached out to her or taken like?

Sally 22:45
Yes.
I do, I mean everybody I like, they always say thank you.

Interviewer 22:55
Yeah.

Sally 22:55
And I sometimes, like I said, this is so sublime, this article, that's the comment I leave, sublime. And she says, thank you, and I say, thank you for providing me with this. And for me, that's what I can say.

Interviewer 23:05
Yeah.

Sally 23:16

I did form a friendship with somebody from medium.
And we were corresponding online, but I stopped hearing from her, but I don't know, I'm not.

Interviewer 23:28
I mean...

Sally 23:32
I do know if there's...
Yeah, no, I don't feel the need to meet writers, people like that, unless they're in fashion, and then I'll eventually meet them someday.

Interviewer 23:45
Yeah, that's part of your work.

Sally 23:46
because it's part of my work, but this woman, she lives in Australia, and you know what I like, and she herself will say she leads a very boring, humdrum life.
And I keep thinking, I gave a lecture at a college the other day and I was saying there was this girl who was sitting in a corner just like, I don't know if she was on the spectrum or whatever, but people like us in fashion.
You always pay attention to the odd people, because their perspectives are the ones that are often the most dynamic.

Interviewer 24:33
Yeah.

Sally 24:34
You know, and this girl, this Michelle girl, she seems to be like that. She's incredibly normal, no?

Interviewer 24:42
Yeah.

Sally 24:46
Performative ********, because that's the other thing. I worked at Ivy Magazine for quite some time, and with Simon Fox and Edward Enninful.
And...
We loved fashion.
But we were, ohh, how should I say it? We knew how to take the **** out of it, because we knew how ridiculous what we were doing, the things we were, yeah.

Interviewer 25:12
To not take it too seriously. Yeah.

Sally 25:19
You know, so that, and even my friends now, a friend of mine just started at Gaia today, and we laugh, you know, how ridiculous. Oh, I showed him something from, you know, from another designer and we said, how...

Interviewer 25:29
Mm.

Sally 25:40
Awful, it was, and it's a designer he worked with, the designer worked under him, you know, and...
Because they're these people, as we always say during Fashion Week, all these people crawl out of the woodwork.
And you never see them any other time in fashion, you know, so that I suppose I have, I'm obsessed by what I do. I'm eternally grateful that I'm trying to earn a living from it, but I don't take it too seriously at all, you know, having that sense of...

Interviewer 25:57
Mm.
Yeah.
And I think that's important.

Sally 26:16
God, look at that old ******* queen. What is she wearing? You know, that sort of stuff. You have to be able to balance it off, and you know, it's only clothes, but clothes, yeah, exactly.

Interviewer 26:22
Yeah.
And to have fun with her.
Yeah, and it's a really interesting topic you raise, like being able to not take things too seriously and find like this balance. Do you feel like on places like Substack, you're able to tap into spaces which are like more politically active and then also

Sally 26:31
Yeah.

Interviewer 26:49
Use it more as entertainment.

Sally 26:50
Yes, because, because Substack allows, because Gabriella Carrefa, she's somebody who doesn't take, I mean, she styles, she's done covers for American Vue.
But she always has her tongue firmly in her cheek, right? So that I know that that's somebody I could get along with, right? Because we're not poor-faced, we're not, oh, brace, but you know, we love what we do.

Interviewer 27:11
Mm.
Yeah.

Sally 27:26
That those of us.
We spend an inordinate amount of time.
Thinking about being original.

Interviewer 27:38
Room.

Sally 27:38
Right, and I think because...
I remember I was sharing them with this friend whose opinion I, I, I, I value.
And that wasn't very discerning because so many of these people I stopped reading on Substat, they would give you a list of what they wore.
And I kind of realised that really doesn't interest me anymore. You know, I need somebody.

Interviewer 27:59
Mm.

Sally 28:10
to discuss Jenae Phillips. I think Jenae Phipps or Phillips. She's somebody, I mean, because I tried to get her on to show studio and she did, couldn't make it. But she's somebody else who's writing. I absolutely love when it comes to fashion. She just did a series
on the style tribes of Tokyo. That was so brilliant. That's what I mean, exactly. Now, now, that's, now, you have just demonstrated.

Interviewer 28:36
Wow, that's pretty interesting.
Thank you.
Yeah, the like the alertness when you hear these things, yeah.

Sally 28:49
Yeah, that's like, wow, there's a.
I even took you and not just...

Interviewer 28:55
Because it's a fresh idea. It's something, yeah.

Sally 28:58
Sleep, precisely, and any.

Interviewer 29:01
And do you feel like these authors, like the people that you're saying who writes these articles, can you get this unique thing from them that you can't get from like mainstream journalism?
Yeah.

Sally 29:11
Anywhere else? Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I would. I mean, because I would like to eventually do my own magazine show. I mean, do I call it a magazine show because I don't want to call it a podcast because the word is beginning to be to be.
To be maligned.

Interviewer 29:33
Mm.

Sally 29:33
Right, I've got a treatment for it, but things like this and voices that you aren't hearing.
Seeing every which way you turn.
You know, exactly. And I mean, because I never considered myself as having good taste.

Interviewer 29:50
Yeah.

Sally 30:05
But...

Interviewer 30:24
Yeah.

Sally 30:25
So that I know when I start reading something.
Then, all of a sudden, they become popular, so, and I know, because with AI coming up, I know I will probably flourish being a taste maker, right? And it's one of those words I've not.

Interviewer 30:48
Um...

Sally 30:51
been actively seeking out that name because it sounds so much wankery. You know, and the number of people who, and it's always the case, it's like the Madonna effect. Madonna was, is the greatest pop star in the world.
But she's no Michael Jackson, she's no Grace Junes, she's no Janet Jackson, even.

Interviewer 31:18
Yeah.

Sally 31:19
But she tells herself she works hard, all of these things.
And then let those look at Stevie Wonder. Today is Al Green's birthday, Diana Rossi.
You know, there are people who, yeah, the legend. And you don't see them going on. Look at Diana Rossi, probably older than Madonna. Diana Rossi isn't trying to go out there and wear Batty Rider with, you know, she's in a long down.

Interviewer 31:34
The Legends.

Sally 31:53
a whole stove full of hair on her head and she just swayed. You know, so I suppose I want to be like that fine wine.

Interviewer 32:07
Yeah, and carve out like a space for yourself in this digital arena, yeah.

Sally 32:08

Face for myself, yeah, that's it.
In the digital arena, this is why I haven't done it as yet. I'm still reading, assessing.

Interviewer 32:20
For sure.

Sally 32:20
I'm refining my point of view.

Interviewer 32:24
Yeah, and that's a good point, actually, because it takes me to this next idea of when you're reading and figuring out what your point of view is, especially when it comes to reading the longer form stuff, what value does this have more broadly, like on you and others?

Sally 32:37
Yeah.
The value, it actually gives you hope.

Interviewer 32:49
Room.

Sally 32:50
It gives you akin. I mean, something, everybody's talking about AI slop. And I said to a friend, how come I'm not getting any AI slop?

Interviewer 32:59
Yeah.

Sally 33:06
Right.

Interviewer 33:06
Yeah.

Sally 33:07
And...
because I follow fashion, I follow, I'm not scrolling, looking for things. I look at, because the other thing I have to tell you, yeah, when I read Substack, as soon as they say something I should look at, I immediately go

Interviewer 33:19
Focus on depth, yeah.

Sally 33:29
Look at it, if it's on Instagram, if it's on TikTok, if there's a name, I Google that name.
And I, one of the things, because I've grown up reading books and magazines, when you're reading on a computer on your tablet electronically.

Interviewer 33:42
Mm.

Sally 33:48
All you have to do is just click on that name. It takes you to who they are, what they do. It takes you to their social media page. You flick through a couple of them. You say, okay, I like this. I'll follow it. Or in my case, I follow. And then if after a while, I think, oh, I haven't been following this for a while. Nothing has been said.

Interviewer 34:01
Yeah.

Sally 34:09
That's of interest, you just unfollow.

Interviewer 34:13
Yeah, I mean, it's easy, isn't it?

Sally 34:15
Yeah, this is it. It's no big deal and I'm not gonna sweat it. I mean, you know, I keep thinking, you know, about AI slop. I'm not, not that I want to get any of the AI slop, but I just don't understand why it is.
This huge topic of conversation.
Hey, because all of my friends...
You know, I never hear any of us talking. I mean, because I did ask, I did ask, are you all getting any AI slop? And they say, what's that? You know, so, yeah, well, because, you know, if something comes up on your phone and you're not interested, you're not opening it.

Interviewer 34:57
Really.
Yeah, yeah, that's true. You have that choice.

Sally 35:08
You have that choice. If something, you know, you're scrolling and remember our algorithm knows us better than we know ourselves.

Interviewer 35:19
Yeah. Do you think that has a lot of control over the information that you're reading on Substack the algorithm and therefore the opinions that you're forming?

Sally 35:19
So...
Ohh, God, yeah, yes, yes.
Precisely, exactly, because I, I, I, as you are saying, because...
There's this other woman who started writing about fashion business, and I don't know if I was reading her somewhere else, Lisa Metcalf, and she did an article yesterday, and I just put a little red heart, and she said, "Thank you," and I was thinking, "Ohh, you know, because..."

Interviewer 35:45
Mm-hmm.
Ohh.

Sally 35:59
It depends on the person, right? We need technology.

Interviewer 36:02
Mhm.

Sally 36:07
Has a lot to do with the people who use it.

Interviewer 36:13
Yeah.

Sally 36:14
Right? Because I always make jokes. I mean, a friends go, oh, no, I'm not on social media. And I say, you know, there were people who felt the same way about electricity, you know. But it's how you choose to use it, how you...
The type of person that you are.
will definitely dictate the type of person you are online. And that's my opinion.

Interviewer 36:41
Mm.
Yeah, interesting. That's a really interesting.
So then that leads me perfectly onto my final question, which is, do you feel any sense of responsibility when it comes to what you're reading or sharing online?

Sally 36:51
Ohh.
Oh, I'd never share something hideous. I will, I share something. I share something because it brings me joy.

Interviewer 37:10
Mm.

Sally 37:10
I constantly say social media affords us to, allows us the capacity to stay in touch with friends without being on the phone six hours a day. All you do is, how are you doing, or you just send an emoji.
Big kiss.
to let you, or as I say to friends, I send you an article. I said, when I do that is to let you know we haven't seen each other in months. But I'm thinking about you. I just saw this and I thought about you, I remember.

Interviewer 37:35
Yeah.
Mm.

Sally 37:52
I was ill for a while. I was receiving dialysis. I subsequently had a kidney transplant.

Interviewer 38:01
Mm.

Sally 38:01
And my therapist said she was so glad.
While I was on dance, it was the first time I ever became ill and infirm, and it had to be like a big one like that.

Interviewer 38:15
Mm.

Sally 38:15
Every time I walked around and I was taking pictures of flowers, and instead of buying people flowers, which I have a big issue with as well, I was sending people pictures of flowers that I snapped as I was walking around London and my neighborhood.

Interviewer 38:26
Oh yeah.

Sally 38:35
And you know, that's simple. It meant something to me because, you know, I'm thinking about you and I saw this pretty flower and thought about you. Send it. That's it.

Interviewer 38:45
No.

Sally 38:49
And you know, because...
We're all busy.
We are all busy. I'm busy and I don't like talking on the phone. The phone for me is always, hi, what time we're meeting, where we're meeting, or if I'm doing an interview or something like this with my friends, I'm not on the phone talking for hours.

Interviewer 39:15
Mm.

Sally 39:15
I don't even do it with my mother. My mother lives in Trinidad because she's busy as well, you know. Or the other day I called her, oh, I can't talk. I'm watching my soap.
And it's the same thing I was like, because before the pandemic I was obsessed with Emmerdale and Coronation Street, and those, you know, Mummy would call me and said, "Why are you calling now? Ohh, sorry, you're so bizarre. Bye!" And you know, you get into habits and the people who love you.

Interviewer 39:37
Yeah.
He.

Sally 39:51
Understand.

Interviewer 39:52
Yeah.

Sally 39:54
You know, I'm not being rude, it's just that I'd rather not talk right now, you know, I don't know.

Interviewer 39:54
That's true.
Of course, yeah. I can relate.

Sally 40:02
Yeah!
Yeah, because...

Interviewer 40:04
Thank you for sharing that.

Sally 40:06
No problem, I mean, because you know, so it's social media.
The, the, you know, of course there will be people like the tech overlords who want to take us back to that feudal state, you know, but there are more of us than there are of them.

Interviewer 40:29
And so do you have any last comments of anything that I haven't asked you related to reading long form stuff online that you think is important?

Sally 40:41
I just think it, it, it, it, I am eternally grateful for the writers who are so...

Interviewer 40:49
Mm.

Sally 40:52
Compel.
To articulate and give voice to emotions that really makes you not feel alone.

Interviewer 41:01
Mhm.
Yeah, that's really nice. I like that.

Sally 41:07
Yeah, it, because you're not, we are not alone. And I mean, I say that because I like my own company. I live alone there many times.

Interviewer 41:11
Yeah.

Sally 41:20
If I don't see somebody, people for the week, I'm happy. I love my own company because I know when I go out, I'm no shy retiring flower, you know, so that when I'm at home, it's for me to regenerate, so to speak.

Interviewer 41:25
Yeah.
Yeah.

Sally 41:41
Mayo.

Interviewer 41:42
Yeah, I really like that. Thank you for all your insights. That was really useful and really interesting.

Appendix B.2: Interview with Abena
14 April 2026, 01:03pm
33m 22s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

[0:00 - 0:04] Abena: I read Substack 2 to 3 times a week. I also get a lot of my content from YouTube, I enjoy videos

[0:04 - 0:19] Interviewer:. And was there a specific reason that you chose to download Substack? Can you tell me a bit about that?

[0:20 - 0:53] Abena: Yes, I think I was finding that a lot of the... news or information that I was consuming was very like short term and it would be like big headlines but without the series getting in-depth knowledge into any of the headlines that I was seeing and despite the fact that I studied human rights law and I felt like the need to be very engaged of having a phone made me less kind of resourceful reaching out to find read longer articles and I also enjoy writing

[0:56 - 0:59] Abena: My writing is more creative and it's political so also as an outlet for myself.

[1:00 - 1:02] Interviewer: So do you also write on Substack?

[1:03 - 1:03] Abena: Yes.

[1:03 - 1:05] Interviewer: And what kind of things do you write about?

[1:06 - 1:27] Abena: I write more about like, it's very abstract stuff. It's very like personal growth. Being in my 20s, I actually am 25 today. Ah, happy birthday! So thank you. It's just a lot about like friendship, relationships, like familial or like just people in my life. Yeah. Just things like that.

[1:27 - 1:35] Interviewer: And does the stuff that you ever read on Substack inform the stuff that you might write yourself? Or are they quite separate?

[1:35 - 1:36] Abena: Definitely.

[1:36 - 1:36] Interviewer: Oh,

[1:36 - 2:09] Abena: yeah. I definitely think so because a part of me, I took a long break. I was doing my master's from writing and it felt like with the weight of the things that were happening around me and in the world, I felt quite... I don't know, it was very conflicting for me to write about myself and personal things whilst knowing that there's multiple genocides going on. And I felt this sort of, not guilt, but a need for anything that I write to acknowledge that and not show written about myself and my personal life without something that I feel barely like moved to something about or to contribute to in like a concrete way not necessarily like I'm able to change the world but just to acknowledge it and to show my support in the way that I can yeah

[2:34 - 2:46] Interviewer: and so then do you feel like that process is more of like a personal thing like it makes you feel like you're doing something for yourself or do you think it also has an impact then beyond yourself

[2:48 - 3:01] Abena: I think primarily usually for myself and then I see the impact that it has on others more like people in my circle because most people read my Substack, like my friends and family. For example, I write about the feeling of questioning yourself before you take action. Like my first one, I wrote two years ago, was about that and how waiting for perfection to act is kind of like a almost an arrogant thought that you have to be so perfect and that you assume that you can be rather than thinking about your community and also just realizing that this perfectionism is very much a symptom of the society that I'm living from this kind of mentality that I've absorbed.

[3:39 - 3:39] Interviewer: Yeah.

[3:39 - 3:41] Abena: I don't know if that answers it, but.

[3:41 - 4:04] Interviewer: No, no, that's a good, that's very helpful. Thank you. I'm also taking notes just so I can absorb information, like reading on Substack. So how would you describe Substack to someone who hasn't used it before? And what kind of specific traits would you assign to it?

[4:06 - 4:16] Abena: I would describe Substack as a space where creating is put over-consuming. So I think there's one of... At least on my side of Substack there's an emphasis

on putting things out without a need for perfectionism. There's such a huge range of things that you're able to read from things about the economy to politics to love and relationships. So just a huge catalog of blogs that are, is continuing to grow minute by minute. I also think it's the sort of place that you can see one of the most common traits is people trying to escape the current landscape of social media. So a word that I often see when I'm scrolling through self-stack is like the term doom scrolling and finding either alternatives or accepting and embracing doom scrolling, but somewhere where I guess the term doom is kind of reduced because it's a lot of like wholesome things or things that make you feel that you're learning and growing.

[5:10 - 5:10] Interviewer: Yeah, Yeah, and is there anything in particular about the layout of the app that is different to other apps that is helpful to you?

[5:25 - 6:00] Abena: I think the way that, for example, saved posts are kind of in the center. I find that on other platforms when I save things, it kind of just grows, but I'm just always consuming new things, whereas on Substack, they kind of put them there's a pop-up at the top and then also there's a much less available short term content like didn't even know that there was a feed on Substack for short term videos until like open to go when I explored a little bit more so

[6:00 - 6:03] Interviewer: yeah I didn't actually know that was on Substack either yeah

[6:04 - 6:25] Abena: yeah I saw it the other day but mostly I don't even know if I've fully figured out how to use Substack, which I kind of like, so I might not even be able to fully answer this question. The way I see it is just like pictures, I see pictures of art, some people write posts, and then the majority is just long or medium-length blog posts.

[6:25 - 6:30] Interviewer: Yeah, so kind of the long-form stuff is useful to you. It's something that you can't get elsewhere, maybe.

[6:31 - 6:33] Abena: Mm-hmm.

[6:33 - 6:43] Interviewer: Yeah. Okay, so... This requires a bit more of like specific memories, but if you don't have a specific memory, that's fine, you can speak more broadly. But can you remember the last article you read and how did you engage with it? Did you accept it for what it was or did you do something else as a result of reading it?

[6:59 - 7:14] Abena: My last one that I read this weekend, by my friend, so I definitely remember it, and it was titled... I think it was said that I walk slowly as a former filter. So she is from Tanzania and I also, I grew up in Tanzania, but I met her here through a friend. And she was just talking about how in Tanzania, there's a lot of things that have to do with how taking things slow is good and rushing is kind of seen as a negative thing. Whereas when she leads here to the Netherlands, it's kind of like the opposite where there's an emphasis on moving fast and there's critiques on like, you know, taking things slow. And I read it on the tram whilst on my way to meet a friend and I was rushing in that moment. So it actually reminded me that it was like the first time in a long time where

[7:53 - 8:18] Abena: I was rushing and stressing. Usually because I lived in London and things like rushing is kind of somewhat a part of me now. But that day it was like an intense one where it was not pleasant and it came at the right time so I definitely feel like it had an immediate effect even when I was on my way to where I was going I immediately felt that like I started thinking of

[8:18 - 8:30] Interviewer: that yeah so did it almost remind you in that moment just to like take a breath like soak up the article or like remember other things even outside like not on your phone

[8:31 - 8:31] Abena: yeah

[8:31 - 8:57] Interviewer: exactly yeah and it's interesting that you said that you were reading on the tram like I feel like It's such a common place to be going on your phone and looking at different things. And some people might be looking at Instagram or Substack. But even then, like, it feels like because you're in a transient moment, like, you're still not able to really focus on the content sometimes. Yeah. Thanks for that answer.

[8:59 - 9:10] Interviewer: So what about an experience when you've... found something difficult to read, so it might be that it's a new topic or there's some terminology that you're not sure about. How do you deal with this?

[9:10 - 9:26] Abena: Sometimes I'll just close it. Maybe it's something where I feel like I might not be just in the mood, to be honest. And there are other times... I find that maybe I've made a bubble on Substack where I do mostly see things that are that I can resonate with or understand but yeah most of the time I'll either leave it behind or I might just push myself a little bit like I found on some occasions where I've just saved it and read it piece by piece not necessarily one

go or just sort of looked at the comments seeing what people are saying I can't say that it happens too often

[9:59 - 10:22] Interviewer: Okay, so yeah, usually the stuff that you're reading makes sense to you. Yeah, then that kind of leads on to my next question, which is kind of about if you ever come across perspectives that you might not agree with, or things that are very different to what you usually engage with, but I'm guessing from kind of what you said that you have a more like structured news feed, right?

[10:22 - 10:27] Abena: I'd say to the most extent, like the most I would have that is maybe...someone who generally has the same opinion as me, but like some opinion. Whereas, for example, like the headline will be something that is kind of like, oh, that's a bit controversial. And then I'll read it. And by the end, I see their point. And I'm like, we have the same opinion. So it might be kind of like an eye catching title.

[10:51 - 11:03] Interviewer: Yeah. So you think they sometimes are doing like clickbait? Or do you think it's more that it took you the journey of getting to the end of it to make sure that it made more sense in your head.

[11:04 - 11:25] Abena: Yeah, I think it's a mix of both. Yeah. It is often too big, but it is in a way where it's still like, I don't know, it might be, I hate birthdays or I hate something that I like, but when I read it, I'm like, it's not necessarily that you're just purely a good thing, but it's a complicated, nuanced relationship. Yeah. Yeah.

[11:31 - 11:47] Interviewer: And then, yeah, do you have any experiences, or can you tell me about your experiences engaging with sub-stack articles online? So that might be through commenting or messaging people or sharing the posts. Do you do that often?

[11:49 - 12:13] Abena: I'd say I want to do it more. I find that I often see, like in my inbox, sub-stack communities where someone who follows some, like people who follow someone are kind of treating it as a group chat and I haven't really gone that far yet. I'm more of like a watcher, like an observer and I think it's really nice but I think I'm still a bit shy for that.

[12:13 - 12:54] Abena: But I do comment more, like I find that over time I've felt more comfortable commenting on Substack posts, especially when it's something that really resonates with me or even like a couple of weeks ago I found a Substack podcast about the Baobab tree

which is like native in Senegal and it's a very important tree for us and I reshared it and commented as well because it was something that was really educational for something important to my country and that person who made that podcast we now follow each other so it's nice like almost a sense of community

[12:54 - 12:57] Interviewer: yeah did you you engage in like any direct interaction or was it just like following each other

[13:04 - 13:04] Abena: I think we always spoke in the comments.

Interviewer: Yeah. I do love hearing these substack stories. And have you ever then taken this engagement offline? So something you might have read has resonated with you and then you might be speaking about it with friends or going to certain events. Do you have any experiences with that?

[13:28 - 13:49] Abena: I think most of the time just speaking with friends or like family members as well. I have two of my friends who write on footsteps back and we want to start writing together like in person. So we make one another because we all work as well. So sometimes you have an idea for months and you don't sit down and write about it.

[13:51 - 14:30] Abena: So yeah, I think I find myself in conversation and even like at work sometimes thinking about like let's say an issue or topic going on in the country that I might not have heard about before because of the news cycle and the way it prioritizes certain regions or certain conflicts going on. It's often like refreshing to be able to learn something from like a closer lens from someone who's directly involved. So yeah, I think within conversations it's

[14:30 - 14:50] Interviewer: like... Yeah, I think that's an interesting point you raise about the source of the information and the fact that you're able to then get like a different lived experience of a topic you might not have known about. Can you speak a bit more about when you're aware of the author and what Substack, what role it plays in that?

[14:52 - 14:55] Abena: I think Substack is already like…threshold in a way, but like people who are reading your blog are already, because there's so much on there, you're choosing to click on this. So it feels more intimate and more intentional rather than, I suppose now we're in a time where like it's an attention economy. So people want to put their voice out there often.

[15:16 - 15:53] Abena: It feels that they almost have to let go of some part of themselves or like make it very accessible if their goal is to reach a higher audience, but when you're writing on sub-starts, I feel like the majority of people I see, it's not necessarily that they intend to reach a huge audience, it's just that they intend to just write something or express something, and it might be for themselves, you don't necessarily know the exact reason, but I think that allows for more vulnerability, because you know that nowadays people don't necessarily take the time to read,

[15:54 - 15:55] Abena: and there's so much stuff out there. Yeah.

[15:58 - 16:21] Interviewer: Yeah, that's a really good point. And then in terms of attention, obviously, because we're talking about longer form articles, you've touched on this briefly in some of your answers, but the last few articles that you have read, do you tend to read them in one sitting or do you feel like your focus is harder to maintain?

[16:23 - 16:24] Abena: It definitely changes with the time. I think the past, like 2026, I would say that it's reduced my attention. Also, I have chronic migraines, so they're better at the moment, but it depends on that. I will say that I sometimes do this thing where I scroll down to the bottom to see how long it is, whether to save it for later or to read it. But something that I want to do, which I haven't done yet, is to use my tablet. I have like a small tablet. And I started realizing that because I associate my phone with just like quick access, that if I start just dedicating my tablet to reading sub-sec articles, I think that that will make it better. Yeah. Because I do read a lot of books. I read every day. And with that, I don't really struggle to keep the cheap ones I know that someone

[17:23 - 17:41] Interviewer: Yeah, it's actually a really good idea and also it being on a bigger screen. Can you remember a time when you paid your full attention to an article and was this meaningful to you? What effect might have had on you?

[17:41 - 18:19] Abena: read one that was, first when my friends write articles I always pay full attention. have like a personal thing in it but then another time was an article I read that was quite long actually where it was a girl detecting her relationship with her it was complicated and I think the title was like my dad hates me or something so another like very eye-catching title and it was very emotive very personal and I think I could tell that it wasn't something that was been born in her style of writing like she even mentioned that

[18:20 - 18:57] Abena: it felt a bit too personal to post but she did it anyways so I think like knowing that there was vulnerability and it's a very detailed personal story like I often read um historical fiction where it feels like you can see this person's life their thoughts and it kind of

aligns with I think I'm a very story based person so even when I'm reading something like long and complicated when it has someone's story in there like perspective,

[18:57 - 19:00] Abena: I tend to be able to focus more. So yeah, I think for that one, it was like my

[19:00 - 19:18] Interviewer: favorite part. Yeah, and so the emotions that you can get from certain authors on Substack is like, is different, I guess, so that can really engage you. Yeah. Okay, so on the last couple questions, and these are a bit more abstract, so get creative, or if you don't have any thoughts, that's fine.

[19:21 - 19:28] Interviewer: But more broadly, like beyond just yourself, what do you think the value of paying attention to a longer article is today?

[19:30 - 19:49] Abena: I think just growing as a person, I find that I used to feel that pressure when I would read something along to retain things or to become smarter, like to really be able to bring it up in conversation at a dinner table or anything. But then...

[19:50 - 20:09] Abena: once I kind of let go of that, it's almost getting lost in something. You can't necessarily get lost in a three-minute read. And when you allow yourself to get lost in something, I know that you can get lost in scrolling, but for me that's not getting lost because it's a different thing every second.

[20:09 - 20:41] Abena: When it's just one concentrated thing that you're consuming, I think it you absorb it in ways that you don't necessarily realize and eventually you might see it, you might not, but it just makes you experience things that you might not experience like physically. Like you might read about a place and the description is so in-depth that you don't actually experience the place, you experience this person's perception of the place and like you're

[20:41 - 21:24] Abena: not able to physically exist in someone else's body but in that time like with reading I feel like it's the only way for me that you truly step into someone else's shoes I think there's that and I also think um you just see how other people think because for me I can be very self-critical about my writing because I find that like I I'm just self-critical because it's me but then I might read someone else's style of writing and get inspired but also be able to appreciate the fact that we do think differently and so we write differently. I think it makes you more educated but also for me like the type of students that

[21:24 - 21:26] Abena: I read is more empathetic. Yeah,

[21:26 - 21:46] Interviewer: I was gonna say that word empathetic. Yeah. And do you ever feel a sense of responsibility for what you're reading? Whether it be like the way that you consume it or the things that you do with the information like does that ever cross your mind?

[21:51 - 22:29] Abena: I'm not sure actually I think I try to not put pressure especially after finishing my studies I had a you know the typical like post-education crisis so I try to let whatever I read how the meaning of it has without me kind imposing like or putting because I can get very like overwhelmed or stressed if I feel like that student mindset of like okay I have to do something with this so I try to just kind of let it naturally happen or if I feel inspired then it doesn't necessarily feel like a responsibility so much as a I

[22:33 - 22:46] Abena: don't know sounds cheap say a calling but it feels like something that just happens in a way if I've read it and I feel like okay I want to do something with it it becomes more of a like

[22:46 - 23:15] Interviewer: natural thing yeah and it's a good thing a point you mentioned about like coming from academic reading to just like casual reading and they are such different styles and I think there's so many rules and restrictions around academic reading that you have to do it in a certain way and then it's actually really nice just to be able to read because you're enjoying it and like it will have effects on you somehow but you're not, as you said, putting pressure on yourself to like achieve that goal.

[23:15 - 23:15] Abena: Exactly, and I think I always struggle to read non-fiction for that, especially if it's very like formal and like non-native because I get back to that school mindset of like I feel like I need to remember these things where I was in sub-sac even when it's non-fiction, it's like the way it's written, it's just like a personal entry. Yeah.

[23:36 - 23:47] Interviewer: So then also, do you feel like different accounts on Substack, like you prefer the ones that are more creative and a bit more abstract, basically?

[23:48 - 23:48] Abena: Yes.

[23:48 - 24:05] Interviewer: Yeah. Cool. And then, is there anything that we haven't spoken about that you think is important to the topic of how we read and engage with information online? And if not, don't worry.

[24:13 - 24:46] Abena: Maybe privacy, I find that the internet is such a dangerous place and often, I don't know, if you learn to know how much of yourself you want to put out there, I think self-start for me is something where I'm learning to be more myself but also choosing what parts

of myself to give on there because it's still like anyone can read it but I think the thing that I like about Fubstack is I kind of know that

[24:48 - 25:23] Abena: I think that's what makes me appreciate things that like vulnerable pieces or pieces that are like for example if someone is writing about something that could make them politically exposed or things like that is like in a way without knowing exactly how it works it feels like a safe environment and people do try like I do see like the community supporting each other and I think that's very important because like I don't know if you are writing about a dictator in your country or something's going on in your country you are putting yourself in a vulnerable position

[25:25 - 25:56] Abena: and I think what I feel is that people are very appreciative there's a lot more gratitude for the content that people are absorbing rather than And I'm assuming it's a given, which I feel like on other social media platforms, there's so much stuff now that it's hard to just sit down and be like, oh wow, this person put effort into this. And even for myself sometimes, I think I'll see really nice things that I know a person has probably put words into, but on Instagram I'm more inclined to like,

[25:56 - 26:05] Abena: sort of like either force myself to think of that or just pass through it. Where I find myself stopping quite often while scrolling, it will be like a…

[26:08 - 26:41] Interviewer: Yeah, that's really interesting actually. And also that you're kind of referencing this more like kind accepting social media space, which yeah, doesn't really happen on many other platforms, but maybe that people are willing to give more time to engage or understand or have more empathy for other people's thoughts. Yeah, I love that. Thank you. So those are all my questions. I'm just going to stop this recording and then... We can finish off the... How do I do that?

[26:53 - 27:05] Interviewer: Okay. So thank you for all your insights. They were really lovely and you spoke really eloquently about things and that was really enjoyable.

Appendix B.3: Interview with Rita
18 April 2026, 08:33am
44m 2s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

Interviewer 0:04
Okay, so the audio recording has started and I just want to confirm that you are okay with me to use the audio for the purposes of this research only.

Rita 0:05
Yeah.
Yes, I am. Thank you.

Interviewer 0:19
So before we start, one more thing, like if you don't have an answer to a question, that's fine. Or if you don't understand.

Rita 0:24
Sorry, you, yeah.

Interviewer 0:27
Can you hear me?

Rita 0:28
That seems to, yeah, yeah, now I can.

Interviewer 0:30
Yeah? Okay. If you don't know the answer to a question or you don't understand the question, please just let me know.

Rita 0:38
Yeah.

Interviewer 0:38
So we'll start like more generally about how often do you use Substack and do you get your information related to like social things or cultural things or political things on any other apps?

Rita 0:54
So I actually have been on Substack for two years, but it's only last year that I finally figured out

how to use the app. And that's also because I was trying to get off Instagram. And I do think it's the gateway. I use it almost daily.

Interviewer 0:58
Mhm.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Rita 1:14
But the way I use it is that since I was trying to quit the scrolling bit especially, I set up an e-mail ID where I subscribe to different substacks. And then I use that e-mail ID to read those substacks. I don't go on the substack homepage as much, maybe like once in a while.

Interviewer 1:31
Okay.

Rita 1:33
So because I wanted to really just not continue the habit of scrolling down because I feel like that's such a problem, the endless information.

Interviewer 1:42
Yeah, that's really interesting. So you basically look at the newsletters that they send you and then, okay, I like that.

Rita 1:42
So.
Exactly, it's a lot less overstimulating.

Interviewer 1:50
Yeah, and that's because do you get distracted when you're scrolling? Like what's the reason, what don't you like about scrolling?

Rita 1:55
Yeah, yeah, so I don't keep the apps on like my phone, especially like I keep them on secondary devices like my laptop or my iPad. But I think what I hate the most is because it's stimulating, right? You look at it, you learn something and especially like.
people like me, like I think people who go on the internet to be all like, oh, I'm using this to like seek information and stay connected to the world. Because I think partially COVID also had a role in that, in how we view our connexion with the world and it's become a lot more online. So.

Interviewer 2:31
Mhm.

Rita 2:33
I think I wanted to just break the habit of trying to justify being stuck in a zone, not doing anything productive for my own life. Like I'm just consuming and I think that got a little exhausting.

Interviewer 2:47
Yeah, I agree. So there's no other apps that you use for long-form content. It's mostly Substack, just to clarify.

Rita 2:56
Yeah, so yeah, but because of Substack, because of the type of posts I've managed to read on Substack, I've signed up for so many letters using that, newsletters using that e-mail ID. So that is the only app I use, unfortunately.

Interviewer 3:03
Room.
Yeah, makes sense. And if you were to describe the format of Substack, not necessarily the app, but like the things that you're reading to someone who hasn't used it before, how would you describe what it is?

Rita 3:19
Yeah.
I'm so sorry, just a second.

Interviewer 3:25
That's okay, don't worry.

Rita 3:27
Okay, if this won't impact the recording, I can like continue. Yeah, I read, I tend to read more like, I haven't like shied away from like the more randomised type of information I was getting on Instagram, but now I'm more intentional about broader categories.

Interviewer 3:31
Yeah, of course.

Rita 3:48

So I think Substack has some great material on AI right now. And I think it also has really nice material and just like general commentary on like culture. I think a lot of people are doing a lot of cultural essays and depending on where they're from, it's really interesting when I come across.

Interviewer 3:53
EMA.

Rita 4:10
something that's related to a culture that's not as much as online. I feel like there was like one whole week where no matter which Substack newsletter I opened, it was always about Clavicular. And I was just like, this is what I, it's this really weird, one of those.

Interviewer 4:23
About who?

Rita 4:29
He's like a subset of the current manosphere. He doesn't consider himself manosphere. He's some look smacking influencer from USA. And he gains so much notoriety online that on subset people were writing entire think pieces about.

Interviewer 4:33
Ohh.
Interesting.

Rita 4:48
what his rise to fame means as, you know, for society and for the internet. And all it was was some like 21 year old getting too much surgery and talking about the benefits of like, you know, doing anything for content. I was just like, this is, so that was really funny.

Interviewer 4:59
No, no, no, no.
Yeah.
So, you were you were finding that that wasn't available elsewhere on social media, but it was coming up in Substack articles.

Rita 5:08
Student.
Yeah, like the rest of social media is so short form, right? So like all the think pieces on him had like so many hyperlinks to just like random Twitter videos and his Instagram posts or his like

Twitch reels or whatever. But and they were all so it was like an entire long form essay about a bunch of short form things that one guy has posted.

Interviewer 5:28
Mhm.

Rita 5:40
And that was really bizarre to me. But I think my favorite, I think another area that Substack is good for actually is brands and marketing. I think a lot of marketing execs and like, you know, creative people are writing on there about the trends they see. So that is also nice. And personally, being from India, I have to say that.

Interviewer 5:57
Mhm.

Rita 6:03
you know, Substack use in India is still like very limited to like a very particular liberal sect of urban elite. And in India, that means like very different things because we have some of the cheapest data plans in the world. And, you know, a lot of people are on the internet in the country right now.
But on Substack, I haven't really come across that many. And the ones that I've come across, you know, they all, even a couple of them, despite being like, let's say, I would say politically centrist in their views, they're all very well researched. I think I'd really appreciate that.

Interviewer 6:24
Mm.

Rita 6:44
I have, however, come across like posts which are just like, you know, they're confusing opinions with facts and they try to pass off their opinion as a fact. Like I came across a post that my friend sent to me, which was about how, you know, Zoran Mamdani's win means that New York is now going to be...

Interviewer 6:53
Mhm.

Rita 7:07
So basically the whole, it was like a more intellectualised take on New York is entering Sharia law because of Zoran Mamdani bit. So on, yeah, so on Instagram and Twitter, it's a funny bit, but

someone wrote a long form think piece about what his socialist roots and his like Islamic background mean.

Interviewer 7:15
Oh, really?

Rita 7:27
and they try to pass off him bringing in a very highly respected law professor of human rights as just a Al-Qaeda defender. And my friend was like, oh my God, he's appointing someone who sympathises with Al-Qaeda to like an office of law. And I was like, that does not seem like what.

Interviewer 7:28
Room.
Real.

Rita 7:47
seems to be happening. Let me just go look it up. And the thing is that someone was accused of being an Al-Qaeda sympathiser and the professor took their case as like a pro bono thing because, you know, he's like, he teaches at NYU and is like very well qualified. And I was like, this is not what that person wrote. So.

Interviewer 8:05
Yeah, interesting, so.

Rita 8:07
You know, I do think...

Interviewer 8:10
Sorry, do you feel, um...

Rita 8:11
Sorry, there seems to be a lag.

Interviewer 8:13
Yeah, no, you continue, you continue.

Rita 8:16
Sorry, you know, I was thinking you repeat the question. You lagged on, I just did not catch anything. Yeah.

Interviewer 8:20
Ahh.
I was just going to say, do you feel confident in being able to tell when these articles have validity or not? And what do you do? Like, for example, in that situation you're just describing, you then went to research it beyond the article. Is that right?

Rita 8:27
Okay.
Yeah, I think that's an important skill to have. I feel like when misinformation became like a buzzword, I was one of the people who was really like convinced that everything on the internet is like, now you have to double check. So I really started getting into the habit of like, if I came across something that I was not aware of at all, I would do like a quick Google check.
and like just to see like, okay, which side of crazy is this person on? And I realised that a lot of times, you know, that's what I also, why I take my time to read the newsletters like properly, because I think between everything, like I said, people often confuse opinions and facts.

Interviewer 9:01
Room.

Rita 9:21
And especially now with how politically divided, you know, the world is, I think that becomes even harder because it's like, it's just so easy to say something like, oh, all Indians are smelly or like, you know, Indians don't have basic hygiene, something like that, you know, to throw it out and just be like, oh, I've experienced it myself. So it's a fact.

Interviewer 9:34
Mm.

Rita 9:43
It's just your experience and you have an opinion based on that experience. So I think people on Substack vary from very technical expertise, which comes from like formal academic backgrounds or journalistic backgrounds to, you know, like people who have a lot of opinions.

Interviewer 9:45
Yeah.

Rita 10:02
And right now it just happens to be largely liberal, but I think we're seeing the trend shift now, what with like Andrew Tate coming on Substack that was like breaking and whatnot.

Interviewer 10:13
Yeah, there's definitely like, it's not set in stone what path Substack can take, really. Yeah.

Rita 10:14
Yeah.
Exactly, yeah.

Interviewer 10:20
And then more specifically, these are slightly like would require a bit of memory thinking, but if you don't have a specific example, you can speak more generally. But do you remember the last article you read and how did you engage with this article specifically? Was it something you agreed with or did you follow up on anything to do with it?

Rita 10:43
So I did not finish reading the article. I had left it open, but there is this newspaper called Hindustan Times in India. It's like a national daily and they actually started a gender based newsletter.

Interviewer 10:57
Mm.

Rita 11:01
on Substack and it came across my feed on the rare occasion that I was on the scroll side of it. So I went and read it and it was basically a...
you know, like a compilation of series of news related to like gender and, you know, like the gap or information related to them. So the top news basically was about how in India now the number of arranged marriages, which is where like your family arranges your marriage, taking place is reducing.

Interviewer 11:24
Yeah.

Rita 11:35
And I was just like looking at the numbers. And then there was a couple of other things that I did not get to cheque out.

Interviewer 11:41
Okay, cool. So then, like, I guess, was there a reason that you didn't finish it or you, like, got distracted?

Rita 11:42
Chiara.
Yeah.
So I saw that numbers bit and I was like, okay, I was expecting like a more long form essay actually, and then it abruptly like changed because the headline was just about the arranged marriage numbers. So I did not open it thinking that it's going to be like a bunch of like, you know, pieces of miniatures of information about multiple things.
rather than just like one essay, which I also don't mind like compilations like that, but I definitely prefer it a lot more if like the headline makes that clear. So after that, yeah. So then I was like very confused as to what's happening. So I went to see like what the page is about and all, and that's how I figured out.

Interviewer 12:12
Mm.
Yeah, so this style of writing is important.

Rita 12:33
It's about the newspaper, and then I just got distracted and I left.

Interviewer 12:37
Mhm.
Fair enough. I've done the same as well. And can you remember a time when there was something you read on Substack that you found difficult, like it might have been a new topic, and how would you deal with this?

Rita 12:40
I...
Yeah.
Oh yeah, so like I said, a lot of people are writing about AI on Substack, right? And so I'm someone who went from like, I was a big AI user, like ChatGPT1, ChatGPT2. I used to use them a lot because I was just like, oh, easy way out of assignments. And

Interviewer 13:07
Mhm.

Rita 13:14
Then I started reading up on it because I was like, okay, this is not giving me what I wanted. And that's when I became a little bit of a very anti-doomsday Luddite about AI. And I then eventually did.

Interviewer 13:26
Mhm.

Rita 13:31
I'm clearly neither approach is good. So I need to learn about this. And I signed up for a bunch of like very diverse voices on AI. There's Shay O. She's one of my favourites in like the more younger lot writing about AI. She writes about how.
you know, like the study of humanities is very important and crucial for the development of just good AI and good practises in general. She also came up with this bot called the critical thinking bot, wherein you put in your arguments and it argues back with you instead of just agreeing with you like most AI.

Interviewer 13:55
Goodbye.

Rita 14:09
So that was really nice. That was really interesting.

Interviewer 14:10
And just like.
Yeah, so I'm gathering then like there was something that you wanted to learn more about and Substack was a useful tool to inquire into that. Yeah.

Rita 14:21
Yeah.
Absolutely, and I think right now, because on Substack, what I what I'm seeing a little bit of is like niches are their own communities, so like if someone writes like really academic articles about just general, like there is this page called Cremo which does like these really...
data intense dumps and analysis about like different correlations that you wouldn't think have anything to do with each other or the general do painkillers cause autism types just because they can. So that person and then a couple of other persons, people sorry, who do things like that, they all will be interacting a lot more.
and you know in the chats or like will be referenced in each of those posts and so on. So I think for AI, the community is like very like strong. That's what I've noticed. So there's a lot of voices.

Interviewer 15:03
Mm.
Yeah, interesting. And do you have any specific examples of those interactions like maybe that you've been involved in or that have like become really important?

Rita 15:20
Yes.
I haven't written as much long form, so I don't like beyond like comments. I don't usually like interact A lot. But I will say one of my favourite interactions was it had nothing to do with any of this. It was like this girl who writes about like rom-coms.
and you know, just a lot of like culture, but like fun culture, just like movie culture and the arts. She writes a lot about it and she's really funny. So I, and she's like a popular voice in like the section that she writes in. So I just like commented a bunch like on one of her posts because it was really funny and.

Interviewer 15:48
Yeah.

Rita 16:02
you know, we got to chatting for a bit. So I think that's nice. It's still early internet stages of Substack, you know, like the app is still new. So like you're still interacting with the creator. There isn't just like too much, oh, this is sponsored, sponsored, sponsored. None of that is happening. Like those barriers of like layers. I think it's like.
you, the writing and the person who's written it, like there aren't additional layers yet.

Interviewer 16:25
Yeah.
This is a really good point. And I wonder then if you like feel positive about the app itself and like the structure of it in terms of like it not being such like an influencer space. Like do you feel like it affords you this unique opportunity?

Rita 16:29
Ohh.
Absolutely.
Yeah.

Interviewer 16:47
Yeah.

Rita 16:48
Yes, absolutely, because like I will rarely open the replies to, even if I'm scrolling, I will rarely go and see the replies to one post. Or more importantly, with the way Substack is designed, you have to go and that comment page opens up on a different window altogether. Love that. Honestly, my favourite feature, I don't want to read everyone's comments. I'm tired of this.

Interviewer 17:06
Mhm.
Yeah.
So that's a good point, actually. I didn't even think of that, but it is really nice when I'm like, wow, I'm going to really look at this long, detailed comment and someone's getting really involved.

Rita 17:11
So, I really like that.
Okay.
Yeah.
Exactly. There's a lot less opinions, right? Again, it's about the number of opinions there. It's like the person who's writing your opinion and a little bit of facts in between. You don't necessarily have to engage if you don't want to on that platform, which is what I like about it. The engagement isn't necessary to gather information from that platform. Like I got back on Instagram.

Interviewer 17:29
Yeah.
Mm.

Rita 17:41
after like some three months. And when I joined it, I realised there were so many cool things on Instagram that I wanted to like save for myself, but like I could only save it on the app. If I had to share it, I had to share it on the app. If I have to like download it, it is such a tedious process. And Instagram has made it deliberately that ways, you know, like the.

Interviewer 17:59
Mhm.

Rita 18:05
pop-ups or the constantly changing where the share is because they want people to stay more on the app rather than, you know, go off it. So.

Interviewer 18:14
Yeah, this is a good point.

Rita 18:16
Yeah, and I think Substack is still a very shareable. It's much easier to share a link to an article

still and, you know, than or just forward an e-mail, I think, than to share like the compilation of 10 things that Instagram things that I should read and then have to go and read this. So.

Interviewer 18:32
Mhm.
Yeah.

Rita 18:35
It's my child, I think.

Interviewer 18:36
This.
And do you think that, or have you noticed this engagement that you talk about and sharing and commenting? Do you feel like it has impact on like people as like a community size, like rather than just individually?

Rita 18:38
That.
Absolutely, because, you know, like I think the easiest way to understand is like people's reaction. If I'm sending my friends a meme, they're going to react with an emoji. If I'm sending my friends a link to a long form article, they're going to tell me they're going to read it later. And most of them actually do end up reading it later.

Interviewer 19:13
Yeah.

Rita 19:13
and then coming back to me and being like, okay, I read that article and here's what I think. And I think that sort of like the type of communication difference, like I'm not texting my friends largely in emojis anymore. I'm talking to them. And I think that's like so great. So I really like that. So I'm writing that high for now.

Interviewer 19:18
I can.
Mhm.
That's really insightful. I'm really glad that you mentioned that. And do you ever have experiences where the engagement is taken offline? So something that you read on Substack is then something that you do in real life?

Rita 19:36

Yeah.
Yes, I do on the side also subscribe for a lot of like Substack recipes and I do end up following a lot of them. I literally like tab them and it started like the whole like Substack venture because there were just so many things that I wanted to learn, not just like

Interviewer 19:56
Mhm.

Rita 20:10
oh, I've read about it and I'm aware. I think there's also a difference in between being aware of something and learning about it. I'm aware of, you know, nuclear energy. I'm not someone who's who knows a lot about it. And so I think it that these types of like very tiny minute differences, which I think like.

Interviewer 20:18
Mhm.
The.
Yeah.

Rita 20:33
currently with how online engagement and information sharing takes place on most other platforms, is become like so niche that it feels interesting, but it's like that's what we were doing for the longest time. And now suddenly it's like, like, you know, you go back after reading all these, like, let's say.

Interviewer 20:46
Prefer.

Rita 20:53
people who are well versed with subjects writing about it and you go back and you watch like a shot with like one of those jubilee audios or reels where people are just debating and you're just like, it's like the equivalent of watching vibe coders try to be like, yes, I know tech. So I'm like, okay, but you don't.

Interviewer 21:06
Yeah.
Yeah.

Rita 21:12
But food, yes, I've tried a lot of recipes.

Interviewer 21:12
Yes, then.
Okay, nice. And would you ever like talk, like you said, you were texting your friends about things, but would you ever talk about like at dinner or lunch?

Rita 21:24
Yeah, absolutely. I'm a big like, oh, I read this the other day person. And thankfully, a lot of my friends are readers too. And also like just for example, like I'm a lawyer and most of my friends are lawyers. So currently in India, there is this like

Interviewer 21:25
Yeah.
OK, then.
Mhm.

Rita 21:45
case going on wherein the Supreme Court of the country sort of like took.
took up the educational bodies, you know, the textbook development, sort of like there was this forum who was developing textbooks for them and they wrote the whole textbook and in that the judiciary was said to be like corrupt. Now there wasn't a lot said, there was just like one line saying that there have been instances of corruption and so on.

Interviewer 22:08
And.

Rita 22:13
in the Indian judiciary, which is true. We're going through a very embarrassing removal of a slightly junior George of a state, and one law student actually ended up writing a post on Substack. And it became such a hot button issue that

Interviewer 22:29
Mm.

Rita 22:32
his post was put up on LinkedIn and it went viral over there. And then suddenly that's all everyone in the fraternity is talking about because that law student claimed to have been threatened by like really senior advocates and stuff to remove the post because he criticised the Supreme Court for saying that.

Interviewer 22:37
Mm.

Rita 22:51
by dismissing the technical committee that finalised the textbook that said that, you know, the court had corruption, they're actually just being slightly authoritarian and they're not like being open to feedback. And in India, we have a history of like, you know, the court's decisions being very like.
Like public intellectuals will come together and opine on them. They'll write letters and stuff. So the whole thing, I think Substack got more attention in India when his post went viral than it did any other day. But that is something that, you know, it really bled into my offline life in a way that none of the other material on Substack has so far.

Interviewer 23:22
Yeah, that's so interesting.

Rita 23:33
So I think that instance was really like an anomaly to like be shared.

Interviewer 23:33
Yeah.
Yeah, and I guess also it like that impacted a lot of people's lives, I guess. It created a lot of waves and people talking and...

Rita 23:42
Exactly, exactly.
Yeah.
Yeah, it was really interesting.

Interviewer 23:48
Yeah, that's really interesting.
Um...
Okay, where am I now? Do you feel it is easy or difficult to build informed opinions when using Substack and what factors might influence this? This could be like a phone factor or like an external factor.

Rita 24:10
Yeah, I think the first thing is not having it on your phone. Because when I had it on my phone, all I did was like I would scroll through like the home feed, open articles I think are interesting,

look at them, see that they were 5 minutes long, save it to read later, and then go back to scrolling.

Interviewer 24:24
Mhm.
Yeah.

Rita 24:28
because I can scroll for 5 minutes, but I can't read for 5 minutes. So I think definitely don't have it on your phone. I also think depending on who you are as a person, like if you're someone who believes everything on the internet has fact, I don't think, I think you will be like any other person.

Interviewer 24:33
Yeah.

Rita 24:48
internet platform user where like you'll be prone to coming across, you know, a lot of misinformation or just confusing the usual. But I do think that if you're someone who, A, either has a niche that they're really invested in learning about, Substack is great for that. Like I said, the communities themselves are very like.

Interviewer 25:04
Mm.

Rita 25:08
segregated and strong. There isn't like, you know, if you're continuously only engaging with like food content, you won't get like some political content out of left field. So I think that's good. Or if you're someone who's there on the platform to just like generally get information.

Interviewer 25:18
Mmh.

Rita 25:27
I would still go with like an awareness of like, okay, this, this, this I want to learn about. And I definitely wouldn't call it a news app. There are some great journalistic pages on it. There are some great news pages on Substack, but.
like any other platform, I wouldn't use it as my only source of information, you know, and especially if like it's like an individual writing who does not have a journalistic background or, you know, like an academic background. And it's just like, let's say someone like me.

Interviewer 25:52
Yeah.
That's good to know.

Rita 26:06
who's writing about tomorrow if I want to write about food, I will call myself just like a hobby writer about food. But if I'm writing about law, I can write with like a little more academic authority. So I definitely go see like what the qualifications of the person are. And that matters a lot to me when I'm trying to like engage more with their content. So I'm intentional about that.

Interviewer 26:12
MMM.
Mhm.

Rita 26:28
Two.

Interviewer 26:29
Really useful answers. Thank you so much. And so this part's more about your attention, like really specifically to longer stuff as well. And you kind of touched actually on a few of these things in your answers, but I'll just get.

Rita 26:33
I'm glad. Thank you.
Yeah.

Interviewer 26:47
see if I can get some more information. But the last few articles that you read, do you, did you read them in, I know you didn't with your most recent one, but did you read them in one sitting and how do you feel about like being able to focus on them?

Rita 26:56
In my laptop.
Yes.
Yeah, so what, so full disclosure, I do have ADHD, but I have been like fully like diagnosed with it. It's not, I saw it on the internet. But I have been reading like, my mom got me into reading like long form books very early on. So this,

Interviewer 27:09

Good.
Yeah.

Rita 27:25
partially is just like a habit that's also very ingrained in me since I was three. And I prefer reading long form. It's just that now that Instagram and all of those distractions are gone, I can read long form essays. The last couple I read, one was Paul Krugman, the economist. He does like these daily like.
dumps, depending on how angry he is at Trump, it'll either be 1 long form essay or it'll be, you know, multiple small snippets. So whenever he posts an update, I tend to go read it, mostly because like, despite being a boomer, his writing feels very young and just like understandable.

Interviewer 27:48
He.

Rita 28:05
So he breaks down the economic impacts of Trump's actions really well. And that one is really nice. Then there is Gary Marcus. He is like one of the first few and very well respected voices on AI. And he calls out a lot of the AI marketing tactics.

Interviewer 28:05
Okay.
OK, thanks.

Rita 28:24
which for someone like me who's oscillated between blindly trusting AI to absolutely hating it, he helps me find a nice like middle ground to like look at both sides. And then there is Ian Artin. She's the one who writes about AI.

Interviewer 28:35
Mm-hmm.

Rita 28:43
you know, the rom-coms and everything. Again, really fun woman. She's very well versed with like literature. And partially why I like her essays is because it could be about a 20 year old Hugh Grant movie, but it'll have like references to Shakespeare and whatnot. So, you know, she really ties the whole picture around.

Interviewer 29:00
It was interesting.

Rita 29:03
I think those three like are ones that I actually like recognise their voices because I read them so often off the top of my head. There's so many more that I really enjoy, particularly like from India and all. But I think those three are fairly international also. Like I've seen them get engagement from a lot of people from different countries as well.

Interviewer 29:10
Mm.
Yeah, interesting. Such good knowledge on all the different authors.

Rita 29:23
Yeah.
Yeah.
Okay.
Yeah.

Interviewer 29:30
And this is more abstract in a way, but when you are really like focused on an article, do you feel like there's meaning in this? Like how, what does it feel like to you when all you're thinking about is reading and what effect might this have on you after you finish the reading?
And.
Okay, yeah.
Yeah.

Rita 30:15
if on food it's like particular flavours that stand out to me. So I'll go engage with like hyperlinks or like find people or recipes that incline towards that small. So that's when my brain is just in like, you know, get cut through all of this and just get to the point. But if I'm writing something that is an that is, you know, like a long form op-ed or like an opinion piece or.
even reading one, sorry. I tend to like try to read it, you know, more calmly and take my time and read it because I really want to see how I feel and think about what they're saying. And I don't just want to be like, oh yeah, she thinks that, you know, saunas are bad, so saunas are bad. Like, how do I feel about it?

Interviewer 30:56
Mm.

Rita 30:58
So that I do a lot. So I think those pieces, it takes me longer to get through mostly because I'm

also trying to, also because I am so glad that most people on Substack add like old school references. But the people that don't, then I will want to like go and cheque like if she is forming this opinion.

Interviewer 31:04
Yeah.

Rita 31:18
what set of facts did she have. So that I would do.

Interviewer 31:20
Okay, yeah. And what does that include? Like, you'll go off the app or you'll find another similar article.

Rita 31:28
I'm honestly very low effort. I'll open a new tab, Google it, because, you know, just like I know like right now with the AI bit on Google also, it's very irritating, but I'll just Google it, open like the news tab and just like scroll through the headlines, see which one sounds the most neutral and go.

Interviewer 31:31
Yeah.

Rita 31:47
Read that one.

Interviewer 31:49
Nice. And then more broadly, and not just in terms of yourself, what do you feel is the value of paying attention to longer texts?

Rita 31:50
Yeah.
I think, so the whole process that I do, let's say like the other day, this is like a couple of weeks back, but because it really stood out to me, someone wrote like this, some 12,000 word think piece on, you know, plastic surgery and...
how it correlates to feminism and how like, you know, there's the whole discourse, right? Like, okay, it's gender affirming surgery and everything, but also some people do take it too far. So like, where do you draw the line and vis-a-vis feminism just for like women, like cis women. So someone wrote a really long piece about that and it really got me thinking because.
I like, I come from like a place in India where like, you know, like the upper class and the upper

middle class, they tend to get a lot of like surgery and fellows and all of that done. So to me, that piece was like, oh, okay, that's interesting. And.

Interviewer 32:54
Really?
Yeah.

Rita 32:59
So, you know, I shared it to like almost every woman I know and I was like, I need to hear your thoughts on this. But what I really liked about that piece was that it went into the history of that type of care. It went into like the economics of it. It went into how much of it is marketing. And I do have to say, I think Substack is just like.
pulling the plug on a lot of marketing tactics, which personally is so good to me. And what a lot of, and what a lot of, it was propaganda, indoctrination. So all of those things were like really broken down really well. And I think something like that when I get to engage with.

Interviewer 33:24
Mm.
Interesting, yeah.

Rita 33:40
I will obviously, A, be more aware, and B, I'm a lot less susceptible when like, you know, someone else mentions wanting to do it or doing it. And I'm just like, okay, great, but I'm not influenced anymore. So I think depending on what people you are reading, it's very good at de-influencing you also.

Interviewer 33:51
Yeah.
Yeah, that's really interesting. And so I guess also like the detail and because there's so much more space than in the short like infographics, that detail has more power is kind of what you're saying.

Rita 34:08
Yeah.
Exactly, like you're really going to think twice before like putting something out like that because people are going to be able to quote you a lot more easily. You know, one is going to quote your Instagram reel.

Interviewer 34:19
Mm.

Yeah, yeah. And then my final question, do you ever feel any sense of responsibility when it comes to what you're reading and what you share with your friends?

Rita 34:38
Absolutely. So I tend to like, when I'm reading like substacks, if I really like a part or a paragraph, I will go restack it for myself. And obviously the restacks are public. So this is 1 instance, I'll give you like 2, one like a little more with my friends, but this one went.
So, for some reason, that note of mine really went viral on like Indian Substack. It was just like me, it was like some 30 people, which for India is like pretty big right now in Substack. Yeah, so I was, and then...

Interviewer 35:02
Mm.
How, how many people?
Nice. And the subs that. That's good. Yeah.

Rita 35:16
you know, and that's when the bots came. So I was like, oh, so they're here too. And you know, like, and then after the bots came, you know, they would come and like, they would obviously have those like weird like pictures and usernames. So some things, what one of the bits was said was that a lot of Indians are moving abroad to places like Dubai.
And then obviously the war happened and Dubai was really impacted, you know, their infrastructure and all. And the commentary was overall largely on the lack of infrastructure in India to support the type of growth compared to something like a Dubai or a London. And then when Dubai got bombed, someone responded to that note saying, still think like that. And I was just like.
That was about very deep seated structure. And it was that note was so jarring. I was like, I was so not used to that type of engagement anymore, even though it's so common on Instagram. I was just like, do I need to like, and then I went, I went to reread the part that I had quoted, reread the whole article because it had been so long.

Interviewer 36:04
Yeah.
Mhm.

Rita 36:22
And then I was like, I still don't see why that person had a problem, like comprehension. And when it comes to my friends, absolutely, like when my friend shared that post about like the Al Qaeda sympathiser being the council himself. So I think a little bit that's when I'm more wary about the posts my friend shares.

Interviewer 36:24
Yeah.
Mhm.

Rita 36:42
than I am as much of the ones that I share with them because chances of me sharing are like, oh, I'll share something that is a common interest or something that I found really engaging and or something that I know they will also find interesting, but it'll never, sorry, one second. That was an alarm.

Interviewer 36:45
Okay.
Okay. Mm-hmm.

Rita 37:02
It will never be, you know, something that I'm just sharing with them randomly that I know they don't engage with. Like my friend who likes cooking, I will not send her the Shay or humanitarian post on AI to be like, hey, read this. So I'm a lot more intentional about what.

Interviewer 37:15
Yeah.
Yeah.
Oh!

Rita 37:25
Right, okay, you are froze.

Interviewer 37:26
Can you hear me?
Yeah, you've frozen as well.

Rita 37:29
Yeah, now I can.

Interviewer 37:31
Yeah, we're back.

Rita 37:33
Yes, yes.

Interviewer 37:36
And so yeah, I guess in a way you were saying that like...

Rita 37:37
May off.

Interviewer 37:41
There's lots of other factors that could influence the things that you share too, like these bots. And so you have to be more cautious.

Rita 37:45
Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, which I think is really good. Yeah, because on Instagram, I had to find anything engaging. I'm sending my friend DIY workshops, I'm sending my friend memes, I'm sending her everything. So, but for Substack, I'll send her like maybe one link in two months and be like, hey,
Maybe this is something you would be into.

Interviewer 38:07
Yeah, okay, nice. And then just finally, I wanted to see if there was anything that we haven't spoken about that you think is important to mention in relation to how we engage with information online.

Rita 38:09
So.
I think just a lot of like fact checking. Like, I know I'm, you know, like, I've been repetitive about that. But so I recently started practising as a lawyer and, you know, like,

Interviewer 38:28
Again.

Rita 38:40
Being in law school is very different from like actually practicing. And one of the things that we do in order to ascertain the facts of a matter from the client's opinion is to like send them these really long lists of questions and get their answers and ask them to give reference.
Like, okay, on the basis of which document, X, Y, Z, are you saying this? So I think ever since I've started like doing that, because that sort of diligence is grunt work for the juniors, it has really like altered how I process information as well. Like in law school I was very, but now I'm able to like.

Interviewer 39:02
Billy.

Rita 39:19
turn that weightiness into a skill set actually. So that actually helps me a lot in how I process information. But what it's also shown me is that most people don't do that level of diligence when they're reading something or they're engaging with it.

Interviewer 39:21
Yeah.
Yeah, that's interesting though.

Rita 39:36
My own friends and family.

Interviewer 39:38
Yeah, but you bought that in from like a different area of your life, yeah.

Rita 39:39
That.
Yeah, yeah, I have had to point out to my friends and family that, okay, like, you know, that is not what the case is. The real information is like this, this, this. There are like 10 subsets and you know, there's not just like this one big picture. So I do think Substack has also had a role to play in it because it's given me the patience to.
sit down and if I can get to the end of a long form article, I can get through like 1 generic article which actually explains it. I don't see the headlines anymore as much. Like, and even if I do, I will go open it, read it before I decide I've read the article. So I think Substack helps with that.

Interviewer 40:14
Yeah.

Rita 40:23
especially now with Instagram captions and Twitter, I feel like the entire world communicates and engages in like headlines. So I think Substack essentially breaks.

Interviewer 40:30
Mm.

Rita 40:35

Well, if you are able to do it, because you could still just be on short the sub-stack notes and not do it.

Interviewer 40:41
Yeah, that's the thing that is that flip side to the app.

Rita 40:44
Yeah, so like I think you really just have to be very like clear about how you want to go on the app and with like, okay, this is what I want to do. And I think that's the best way to use Upstack. I don't think it's an app you should be on just for like vibes.

Interviewer 41:01
Yeah, I agree. Thank you so much. I also want to cheque if I'm saying your name right. Is it Sahed?

Rita 41:04
Anytime.
Yeah.
Yes, you're actually your pronunciation is better than a lot of Indians.

Interviewer 41:10
Okay. Amazing. That, like, your answers were really interesting and I'm really happy to have had this discussion with you and I really hope you enjoyed it as well.

Rita 41:13
Yeah.
Thank you so much. I'm glad we could have it. I did. This is really nice.

Appendix B.4: Interview with Seamus
22 April 2026, 11:06am
40m 12s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

Interviewer 0:04
Okay, the audio is recording. I'm just going to grab your consent again that you're okay for me to use this audio for the purposes of my research.

Seamus 0:12
Yes, I am.

Interviewer 0:13
Nice. So we'll start kind of casual. It's a conversation as much as it is like a structured interview. It doesn't have to go in one direction and based on your insights, we can go in different ways and let me know if you have any questions or you don't understand anything that I'm asking of you. But
I guess my initial curiosity is what made you get involved in Substack in the 1st place and how long have you been using it for?

Seamus 0:42
I probably started in December, probably December of 2024, I think it was. It had been, I think this is the case with a lot of people on Substack, particularly those that are in the casual lane. They did

Interviewer 0:50
Mhm.

Seamus 0:59
they were using Substack before they realised they were using Substack. So I would have, I can't think of a good example right now, but there will be publications or people who were publishing their newsletter through Substack. So I was receiving Substack publications, you know, long before I joined. But then, I don't know, maybe it was an article about where does, where do you find your audience?

Interviewer 1:17
Yeah.

Seamus 1:22

now, or how do you develop your career as a freelance writer? Something had steered me in that direction because for a while I was thinking of starting a newsletter, but more often than not I was just using social media to share.

Interviewer 1:34
Mm.

Seamus 1:35
personal bits of writing. So I would use Instagram, for example, as like a journal. I would just max out the caption every day and find something within the field of arts and culture that I was, that I responded to and I would just write on there. But the engagement was always very meagre and it just went downhill, downhill, downhill to the point where I thought, you know what, this isn't really, this isn't really my platform.

Interviewer 1:55
Okay, interesting.

Seamus 1:55
This isn't really my format either. So let me find something else and commit to a schedule, something with a particular rhythm to it and a cadence and see if I can build a readership through that.

Interviewer 2:09
And are you posting a lot now in terms of writing? Like, what's your audience like these days?

Seamus 2:14
No, no, because the same thing happened on Substack. I don't know whether I tapped out too soon, but I wasn't happy with the feedback and the engagement I was getting from the effort that I was putting in. I mean, you do need to look at yourself, quite honestly, as a writer, particularly in the current media age, and be honest about
whether you are committing to the frequency that you said you would commit to and whether you are, I don't know, presenting the ideas in the most easy, digestible way. I started out by having a newsletter that would have three very clear sections. So there'll be like a main story, something contemporary that had caught my eye that I wanted to comment on.
or offer some research on. And then there would be something from the archive just to try and revive a piece of work from the past that I felt was either relevant to the current moment or something that I thought deserved a bit more attention. And then there'd be like quick little links or snacky sort of desserty kind of third course at the bottom of it. But I just think it was too much information for a lot of people to take. So

Interviewer 3:06
Yeah.

Seamus 3:13
I didn't really alter that format. I just, just withdrew. I was, guess I was, I'm 46 years old, right? I got to a stage now where I'm like, I just am what I am. And a lot of us try and chase popularity or fame or engagement. And I thought at the end of the day,

Interviewer 3:17
Slowly stopped. Fair enough. Do you then fill up?
Yeah.

Seamus 3:33
I wanted to feel quite instinctive and impulsive about the way I was writing. And if I had something I wanted to write, I would write it. And it was that if it was 2000 words or 1500 words, I would write it. If I had three main things I wanted to share with that audience, I would just publish it and you could take it or leave it. And I'll notify you about it on notes two or three times, but no more. I wouldn't keep like pumping out notes like people are doing at the moment on Substack. It's just a real

Interviewer 3:36
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Seamus 3:56
attention grab which I find beyond fatiguing now it's I just have to say what I have to say and move on.

Interviewer 3:59
Room.
And do you think then, like, kind of related to what you're saying, the purpose is more, like, it doesn't matter how people receive it or whether it has meaning, but it just feels like it was good for you in that moment, something you wanted to share?

Seamus 4:15
I think it's like there's a dual process happening that needs to happen rather in the sense that you are saying what you need to say, you're articulating whatever those thoughts and feelings are and

you're researching as much as you need to to back them up, but also you're just being attentive to how the work is being received.

Interviewer 4:24
Yeah.

Seamus 4:34
So if I feel like there's only one person that's commenting on something that I've written that I feel would have a kind of universality to it, or I feel like it's not too esoteric, someone should be able to respond to that, particularly if they signed up in the beginning to a newsletter. That's the thing with the newsletter, I never really understood. I was a little bit more forgiving of social media because it's like a post that you might see that you're attracted to.
And you might like that. I've had that many times on social media where people have just popped out of nowhere, followed me, and then I've never heard from them again, never seen them again. Whereas newsletter, with a newsletter, the relationship should be a little bit closer between you and whoever's subscribing. So I do often wonder when I publish things like, why are you here? You know, why are you here?

Interviewer 5:11
Yeah.
Yeah.

Seamus 5:17
is a bit strange. I'm not expecting everyone to comment, you know, on everything because that's just naive, beyond naive. You're just setting yourself up for failure. But I do wonder, I think the main thing is like there's just a limited attention span that people have at the moment and people are easily fatigued and stuff that stands out needs to be

Interviewer 5:18
And.
Yeah.

Seamus 5:37
of a very particular perspective on a very particular theme or topic. Now you need to keep doing it week after week after week, otherwise you're not going to get anywhere. And if I'm being really honest, I haven't done that. So that's probably why I am where I am.

Interviewer 5:44
Consistency.
Yeah.

And do you think when you speak about like the engagement, do you have any experiences that you can recall, whether you're a reader or the writer, where you've connected with people and maybe something has come from that and there's been like a sustained community or relationship?

Seamus 6:00
Mm.
To be honest, the ones that I've, the relationships that I've valued most on Substack did not happen online. They happened offline. So there was a Substack London Writers Group that was set up by a couple of ladies when I actually joined in December. I can't remember if I joined first. No, that's it. I joined first to maybe publish one or two just to test the waters. And then I found out about this gathering.

Interviewer 6:16
Mm.

Seamus 6:30
And neither of these two ladies had organised writers groups before. I think one of them had done something informally in her office working for Amazon, trying to build a reputation, I guess, as a writer or an influencer in that field. But everyone was kind of starting from the same position. We were there. We chose it was like a support group.
the first session because everyone was there like going, God, we really want our writing to be valued. And we just were there to listen to each other's perspectives on writing and why we had started those sub stacks. And then that momentum built and built for like 3, 4 sessions after that. I think we would meet once every three months, two months. And some of those relationships would

Interviewer 6:51
Yeah.
Interesting.

Seamus 7:10
would develop online, one or two people in particular, I'll go back and forth with on messages occasionally. And we would be in the comments, right, every time we publish, trying to support each other, which is really how it should be. But a lot of those relationships have withered because I haven't actually been to the last two or three because I got a dog and the dog is just sapping all my energy. So I haven't really been able to attend.

Interviewer 7:18

Yeah.
I've got some way.

Seamus 7:30
But I think this is how I feel generally about a lot of engagement around my work now. I think I'm tired of trying to be somebody to somebody who I don't really know and who is not really in my proximity. I've said it over and over again now that I think my future is in my local area right now. It's getting more involved in

Interviewer 7:44
Mm.

Seamus 7:52
politics and the developing culture and trying to help young people come through in arts and culture and creative industries in my area specifically, because I had the best chance of developing those relationships face to face.

Interviewer 8:00
Yeah.
Yeah, and it's a good point, this kind of online, offline, bi-directional relationship. Do you think even beyond Substack, there are specific spaces online which can facilitate the offline community work, or do you think actually it might limit?
The offline notes.

Seamus 8:23
I've met, I'm trying to think if there's been any overlap between the Substat groups and other groups. There was a point where I was attending a regular meetup for what they would call mojo journalists. You ever heard of that term? So people that were using their mobile phones to record stories.
and present those stories. It was around the time people were getting very interested in the possibilities of smartphones to be something other than tools that you would browse on, that you would consume information on. They could be a tool for somebody that was a citizen journalist or somebody that was interested in presenting their perspective on the world.

Interviewer 8:43
Okay.

Seamus 9:02
or on a particular strand of life and chopping it up and editing it quickly on the phone and getting it out. And there was a point where a lot of newspapers were getting excited about the

possibilities as well. Those gatherings just stopped after the pandemic and they never really started up again. But I would be meeting every month with other journalists and people that were far more experienced in the newspaper world.

Interviewer 9:02
Mhm.
Yeah.

Seamus 9:22
who would be giving little sessions and demos, telling you about the latest gimbals and things that you could use and tipping you off on what to try, different techniques.

Interviewer 9:30
Interesting. So it's called Mojo.

Seamus 9:32
Mojo, yeah, M-O-J-O. I'm sure there's still a group going on Facebook. There were several little groups and some were international, some were localised to London or whatever city it might be. So I was developing, I was going back and forth with some people on e-mail from that group. Never really overlapped with the substack. The substack era seems to be quite separate.

Interviewer 9:53
Mhm.
Right.

Seamus 10:06
by that name, that we weren't really interested in talking shop very much, but that was a nice way just to try and talk around your practise and around your vocation.

Interviewer 10:06
I.
Mhm.
Nice. And you mentioned politics. Are any of the articles that you read on Substack like politically charged or have any kind of effects if you were to read them online and then you might then involve yourself in a political engagement offline?

Seamus 10:35
Yeah, there's, I mean, I'm looking specifically at London, London-based newsletters. I haven't actually found any Lewisham. Lewisham is my borough, South East London. I haven't found any that are specifically covering that borough. But London-centric, just as someone that's been

observing journalism and the journalism industry for many, many years now, I'm really interested in

Interviewer 10:35
Yeah.
Oh.
And.
The area, yeah.

Seamus 10:54
sustainable models and financially viable models, ways for journalism to endure and for you to bring new writers through. And what London Centric have managed to do, I mean, they're running in a profit.
I think they've been running in a profit for pretty much all the time that it's been run. It's run by a guy called Jim Waterson, who used to be the BuzzFeed news editor. And then he went and worked for the Guardian for quite a while, and then he went up and set up his own publication, specifically covering sort of in between the cracks underground.

Interviewer 11:16
Mhm.

Seamus 11:26
covert reporting around London, the kind of stories that people would be interested in but might not see.

Interviewer 11:30
What's...
And where does he publish it?

Seamus 11:34
Substack. Yeah, yeah, it's a substack. Big, big following. I can't remember how many thousands of subscribers, but yeah, it's going really well.

Interviewer 11:34
Ohh, he's does it on Substack
Yeah, interesting. And this requires a bit more like specific memory work, but if you don't have a specific memory, you can answer more broadly. But do you remember the last article that you read on Substack and how did you engage with it? Was it something you agreed with or did you have to think more about it afterwards?

Seamus 12:01
There is one, what did I think? The specific one is about a release, a music release, that was facilitated by a magazine. It's a music magazine called Brick, B-R-I-C-K, and they started off by covering contemporary rap culture and hip hop.

Interviewer 12:09
Mm.

Seamus 12:22
but have expanded to cover other areas of music in the last year or two. But they had found out a story about a guy who had released a record from a penitentiary in Chino in California. And it turns out that he had quite a storied early career before he was sent to prison for, I think it was possession of cocaine or dealing cocaine. He'd worked with like Marvin Gaye and
DJ Rogers and like very like the luminaries of the soul world of the 70s and the 80s. And somehow I managed to get hold of his equipment and somehow managed to produce this amazing sort of like soul dance record and had equipment that you never would have expected someone in prison to have. And they filmed this video just of him by himself, just really enthralled to the music.
So they published an oral history of his.
path from prison to making that record and all the twists and turns. And it managed to also unite a family at the same time because the family was estranged. The sister had not seen a brother for many, many years. The son of the of Chuck Bynum, this guy had not had never met his father. So just in the process of this record label and these diggers trying to
get this record out. They had managed to bring the family together and Chuck Bynum didn't live to see the release of that record, but it was something that he really hoped would happen in his lifetime. So that's a really, really nice piece. That's about 1500 words and that was published about two weeks ago, a week and a half ago.

Interviewer 13:40
And.
Yeah.
And it was the first time you'd heard of that story or you knew about it. Yeah, yeah.

Seamus 13:48
Yeah, yeah. I'd seen the record list. I received several because I do a lot of music creation and I broadcast on a local radio station here and I started out as a music journalist. So it's always been a big part of my world. And that was a record in a listing of a newsletter for a record shop. And I thought, okay, what's that about? Are we interested in people that didn't quite reach the summit?

Interviewer 14:02
Mhm.

Seamus 14:09
In their lifetime, or you know the late bloomers, people of that nature, and he was definitely one of them.

Interviewer 14:10
Yeah.
Yeah, I don't know if you've heard of Arthur Russell as well. He has a similar story of that kind. Yeah, yeah.

Seamus 14:18
Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Amazing. I'm watching the documentary made by the filmmaker who made the documentary about Arthur Russell's. He released another one recently about, what's his name, the guy that played Pee-wee Herman.

Interviewer 14:28
Ohh.

Seamus 14:36
American artist. Yeah, I didn't know anything about this guy, but I started the documentary yesterday and it's a fascinating story of a kind of a little maverick that made his own way in the 70s and 80s in America and just had all these different secrets that he managed to hide while he was playing this character that people, it became his identity really.

Interviewer 14:52
All right.
Okay.

Seamus 14:55
His character became his identity.

Interviewer 14:56
I put that on my list.

Seamus 14:59
Yeah, just look up Matt Wolf. Matt Wolf is the director, so just look at his latest documentary.

Interviewer 15:01
Not Room.
And when you're like excited and engaged by these articles, do you ever like discuss them with your family or your friends or is it something that you keep quite internal?

Seamus 15:14
I sometimes mention it to my housemate because he's interested in a lot of the same arts and culture, but yeah, it's not really, he's not, he's obviously, he's got a lot less time because he's working three nights a week in the pub. But I'll occasionally share one or two things that I find interesting with him or I'll include links to those articles if it overlaps with my radio show. Sometimes I'll find someone who I want to spotlight on the radio.

Interviewer 15:27
Mhm.

Seamus 15:37
show, a track, it could be just a track or an album and I'll link to the article that inspired that inclusion, for example.

Interviewer 15:44
Yeah, okay, yeah. And do you ever come across articles on Substack, which you like, not necessarily disagree with, but a perspective that you're not used to? Like, do you feel like you're receiving information that aligns with you or you're able to like break past those like algorithmic boundaries, so to say?

Seamus 16:03
I mean, I do a lot of mentoring. So one of the things that I'm very particular about is how do you describe it? I guess it's media, media literacy. Some people might describe it as, and what I mean by that is that you'll go and seek out the contrarian view, right? A lot of us will have like an instinctive reaction to a story.

Interviewer 16:14
Then.

Seamus 16:23
a bias, one prevailing view on something. Whereas I always think it's important to go and challenge yourself and to find the counter narrative to that. So I try and do that as much as possible. I'm human like everybody else, so I'm not able to do it every time. But if I feel like

Interviewer 16:38
Yeah, it's something conscious of.

Seamus 16:41
Yeah, if I've got a really instinctive, sort of almost vehement reaction to something, then I want to know what the alternative is. What's the counter argument to that?

Interviewer 16:49
And.
Yeah. And then I'm guessing you'll take like your research off the app and you'll, I don't know, maybe you could read a book or you're just Googling things. Is it like a long process or it's usually a cool?

Seamus 17:00
Yeah.
It can be. Yeah, I'm very research oriented. So I'm the kind of person that's always making notes and then saving links. I use e-mail in a really strange way as well. Like I always fire up like draughts of emails and I'll just start typing into there. And I'll use that as notes. Yeah, that's often my notes.

Interviewer 17:06
Yeah.
Just.
And then you send them to yourself. I like that.

Seamus 17:23
Yeah.
Yeah.

Interviewer 17:27
And are you yourself a commenter on other people's Substack posts? Do you like to sort of restack or yeah, message people privately? Can you remember like a specific experience where you engaged in a good conversation on Substack?

Seamus 17:32
Loads. Yep, loads. Yep.
Uh, mmm.
It's less, the tail is shorter now than it was when I first, I don't know, I mean, that's a whole

separate conversation. I just feel like the engagement and the sense of togetherness that I felt like early on in Substec is not what it was, what it once was. My level of

Interviewer 17:50
Okay.
Okay.

Seamus 18:06
of activity and involvement is a little bit less than it was then. So obviously you've got to take that into account. But I don't know. Look, it's a form of social network now, isn't it, really? I just think it's another facet of this overwhelmingness that people feel. There's a lot of stuff out there. There's more people on Substack now. There's more different kinds of content, variety of content on there now.

Interviewer 18:23
Mm.

Seamus 18:28
There's a lot of clutter.
This is why I identify with a lot of the criticisms of Substack now in the sense that people came, a lot of people came to that platform just for the simplicity of it. Like why does a social network have to be doing X or a platform need to be doing all these different things? Like the beauty of it was that you would have a direct line of communication with a reader and you would just publish.
to your desired frequency or cadence, like every week on your odd little niche viewpoint or window in the world. It's just got a little bit convoluted now, and I think that has made it a lot, it just makes people want to tap out of things a lot sooner, I think, unless you are a high, high user of this platform.

Interviewer 18:52
Yeah.
Yes, it.
Yeah.
It's interesting that you reference it as a social networking platform and kind of similar to other things in this kind of overuse, but not necessarily in the most effective way. Is there spaces where you feel like you can receive information about news and culture, which are more simplified?
That might not be Substack.

Seamus 19:34
I always say that my favourite way to receive information, stories, journalism is always

newsletters. Like, I feel like I have the best control of this of this type of information when it's through my news, through my e-mail inbox. I'm not tired when it comes to running my inbox, but it's just...

Interviewer 19:51
Thank you.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Seamus 20:21
I can't compare Substack to what it was like pre-notes, because I know there's a lot of people who I read in the comments that do moan about how things have changed so much, and that's their yardstick. Their yardstick is how it was before, where it was, like I said, very, very simple. You publish a newsletter, I'll read it, or I'll ignore it, and I'll come back.

Interviewer 20:40
Room.

Seamus 20:41
and read it the next time if I want to in my inbox or, you know, I subscribe or unsubscribe. Simple, like really simple. You knew where you stood, but now I think there's just so many different bits of information that are distracting people. It's hard for them to just focus on where they came in the 1st place, which was to read a writer.

Interviewer 20:46
Yeah.
Mhm.

Seamus 20:58
On a particular, on a particular patch.

Interviewer 21:00
And this leads me quite nicely onto my next line of questioning, which is more related to attention and engagement, specifically with these longer pieces. When you are reading Substack articles, do you feel that you can finish them in one sitting? Like, how is your experience with that, or do you tend to get distracted?

Seamus 21:07
Mm.
Mm.

Depends on the length of it. I think if they're out...
Sorry, my dog's biting. Don't do that. Don't do that. You've eaten. Stop it. Stop it. If it's like 10, 1000 words or whatever, or 1500 words, I can usually do that in one sitting. If it's a bit longer, like there's 3000, 4000 word pieces I've read, which are like state of the nation kind of addresses.

Interviewer 21:27
Okay.
Yeah.

Seamus 21:45
About people's.
obsession with optimising themselves and their lives, or it could be something really in-depth about masculinity and the relationships, the withering relationships between men and women, which seems to be the preoccupation of a lot of people right now for obvious reasons. The disconnect between men and women, those pieces are very nuanced and it's something I can't really get the full measure of.
In one reading, so I will probably listen to it if the function is enabled there for me to listen to it, and then I'll come back to it later. So, quite often with the longer pieces, I'll treat them as...

Interviewer 22:14
Okay, yeah.

Seamus 22:21
Audio books.
and I'll come back to them.

Interviewer 22:25
And the nuanced ones, which sometimes can be kind of difficult to digest, you mentioned one example, you'll put the audio on, is that other things that you might do if you're not quite understanding the content or do you tend to move on?

Seamus 22:30
Mm.
If there's that, well, sometimes you have people that use particular phrases that you're not familiar with. So if I find one of those in the piece and there's not explained in the piece, and obviously I'll go and do some research online through Google or whatever and see if I can get to the bottom of it, build cultural references or whatever that aren't really elaborated on in pieces, I'll go off it, I'll pause it, I'll go and find out what that means and I'll come back.

Interviewer 22:52

Yeah.
Thank you.

Seamus 23:04
But typically, yeah, I tend to analyse a lot of the longer pieces of work, as I would do with like a New Yorker piece. So I read when I can, when I'm able to. I'm not subscribed because there's a limit to the number of articles you can read. But I will listen to or read New Yorker pieces and obviously there can be up to 10,000 words. So that's, you know, that's going to take me a long time to really understand and appreciate.
So typically with those pieces, I'll listen to them twice, maybe three times. If they're really, really good, I'll file them in a folder on Google Chrome. I might even share them with mentees, for example, as exceptional pieces of writing to emulate.

Interviewer 23:33
Yeah.
And sorry, just outside of that, your mentees, are these people that you just find or that come to you and are interested in your career and...

Seamus 23:51
No, no, I am. I'm part of a programme called Arts Emergency, which is a charity to help people from 16 to 25 predominantly to enter the creative industries. And that's in the broader sense. They could be graphic design, they could want to be graphic designers, writers, I don't know, even puppeteers, you know, all kinds of different

Interviewer 24:10
Mhm.

Seamus 24:10
different potential professions. But the idea is that you will see that person, develop a relationship over a year, see them in person or online every month and try and move them towards a particular career focused goal. Occasionally we'll help with their studies or try to set better goals and to portion their time and to deal with stress.

Interviewer 24:23
Yeah.

Seamus 24:31
lots of different ways we can help that young person. But yeah, because the core of my background is as a writer, even though I'm not really doing much ******** journalism anymore,

I do get assigned people that want to enter the journalism profession. So I do do my best to share the work that moves me still.

Interviewer 24:46
Yeah, interesting.
That's cool work. And have you ever had an experience where something you read on Substack has been useful for guiding one of your mentees?

Seamus 24:59
Probably, I'm trying to think what I've sent over.
Um, yeah, there's a poet and an author called J.J. Bowler.
and he wrote a really, really nice comment piece about the Theru documentary. I can't remember why we were talking about it. My mentee is...

Interviewer 25:10
Mm.

Seamus 25:20
quite open about her career, I think, at the moment. She maybe wants to write about film and television, but then equally she may want to move into something that's a little bit more marketing focused. I think she just wants to create content in a way, but in a way that's more journalistic. She wants to create journalistic content.

Interviewer 25:35
Mmh.

Seamus 25:39
So that could be in any format. It could be in social media, or it could be through longer form written pieces. And she'd assigned herself the job of reviewing the film adaptation of The Long Walk, which is a Stephen King book. Are you familiar with that?

Interviewer 25:57
I'm familiar ash, but not really.

Seamus 25:59
Yeah, it's about boys basically walking to the death. It's very grim, but it's like a very dystopian novel where this super state has got these boys trying to prove their masculinity and their manliness to one another by outlasting one another on this walk to the death in some backwater of America. And there was obvious overlaps with the documentary, which I think was released within sort of

Interviewer 26:03
Mm.
Play.

Seamus 26:22
two, three weeks to a month of her having started that book. And I said, okay, well, there's nice overlap here. Maybe you should just try and see if one can help to expand the context of the other. And she kept asking me what I thought of the documentary. I said, I'm not sure at the moment. I need to just sit on it a bit longer because I know the obvious criticisms.

Interviewer 26:31
Mhm.

Seamus 26:42
about it not being, not holding them accountable, holding the men that featured accountable enough. But I said, there's another story here, really. Just wait and see what else you can find around, dig around. And she couldn't find anything else. So I sent her the substack that I'd read and JJ Balbo was talking really interesting terms about the lack of role models, the
the dwindling of youth, youth provision, social care, all of that stuff, youth clubs going down. It was like a very sort of...
360 piece on why boys find themselves so susceptible to these ideas and this propaganda now. So I sent that to her and yeah, still waiting to hear about what she thinks, but the idea is that she would do another version of the piece with more of a fuller examination of the documentary.

Interviewer 27:11
Yeah, quite good.
Yes.
Yeah, so it's actually quite a useful space for inspiration, I guess.

Seamus 27:29
Yeah, still, no, no, there's lots of writers now. I think my issue right now is just trying to work, make it work for me, because I'm interested in lots of different topics. And I do find a lot of the other content that notes could be used more efficiently, right, to drive readers.

Interviewer 27:36
Mhm.

Seamus 27:48
to emerging writers. Like that's my core criticism of that platform. It's not doing that job well

enough. As a discovery tool, it's not doing its job well enough. And then you have all these big writers coming on like a Margaret Atwood or whoever or a Charlie XCX or whatever. And they're just, they're sapping up all the oxygen, right? And all the energy. I don't want to like,

Interviewer 27:52
Yeah.
And this name.
Thank you.
Mhm.

Seamus 28:10
you know, close the door on these people because it's democratic at heart and I want people to have a chance to publish what they want to publish on that platform. But there's a limit to how much attention people can pay. And I think there's a chance, there's often the situation is that the person that's better well known is going to

Interviewer 28:22
Mhm.

Seamus 28:29
is going to be the one you turn to when actually there's someone that's lagging on like 30, 40 followers or barely that, who has something really interesting to say, who somehow through that algorithm should be pumped up the pecking order. And it's not really happening.

Interviewer 28:41
Yeah. And do you think that the sort of governance style behind Substack should be more responsible and more accountable, held more accountable for these issues?

Seamus 28:54
Hard to say, isn't it? Because I mean, if you are paying into a business, you would expect there to be...
A an accountability of sorts, right, and a certain level of...
of performance, right, in terms of like what they're providing to you and what's been assured to you. If I'm a free subscriber, if I'm using that platform for free, really what's owed to me?

Interviewer 29:20
Yeah.

Seamus 29:20
I don't know. They're already...

Interviewer 29:22
So you almost feel like you also are responsible.

Seamus 29:26
Yeah, yeah, I think I just have to find a way to navigate that platform in a way that fits into my life. And right now, I think it's important just to focus on the people that I subscribe to, who I felt an affinity with from the beginning, from the first piece I read, and focus on that and spend less time in notes because there's enough feeds going on already in my life.

Interviewer 29:26
Yeah.
Mhm.

Seamus 29:46
But I don't discount the use of that tool [notes]. It can be useful to try and direct somebody to a piece of work that you feel deserves a bit more attention. So I haven't given up on using it. Whenever I publish, I'll share, I'll write two or three different ways of introducing somebody to the thing that I've created, whether it's a podcast,

Interviewer 29:56
Yeah.

Seamus 30:08
or whether it's a written piece of writing. And yeah, just hope that it catches an eye or two.

Interviewer 30:14
Yeah.
And my final question is slightly more abstract. So more broadly, what do you think the value of paying attention to longer articles is, both yourself and beyond?

Seamus 30:31
I think we are in the age of...
snap judgments and quick decisions and binary thinking and all of this doesn't make for the real pursuit of knowledge, I suppose, and wisdom. There's a talk I shared yesterday, having shared it with my mentee, because I just thought, wow, if I'd heard some of this stuff when I was 16, 17 years old, it really would have
made me so much more clearer in thought, you know, in the chaotic mind of a teenager. It was a tool given by Elif Shafak, the author.

Interviewer 31:00
Mhm.
Yeah.

Seamus 31:08
And she is fascinated by this whole notion or the distinction between information and knowledge and wisdom. And you don't need to be a genius to work out that we've got far too much information and not enough knowledge and precious little wisdom. And she says it really succinctly. She says, like, knowledge can't be rushed. I feel like
This is why I'm doing what I'm doing, right? This is why I have to go and listen to things like three, four times, 3000 words, 4000 words plus, because I'm not interested in surface level knowledge. I could glean that from an article in my lunch break or whatever. And how much will I really be able to learn from that short window of opportunity? I just think right now, people really need to lean into the detail of things and the nuance of things. If we're really going to have any

Interviewer 31:45
Mhm.

Seamus 31:51
depth of understanding and acquire any kind of real wisdom that's going to help us to understand how the world is moving right now and how we can relate to one another. It's just not going to happen from like quick 300 words, 200 word Google summaries or whatever it might be.

Interviewer 32:07
I agree. And is there anything that you haven't spoken about or that I haven't probed you on that you think is useful to sort of the relationship between how we engage with information online and beyond?
The space.

Seamus 32:24
I mean, it's a whole other topic in itself, a whole other discussion, but I think what really is going to aid somebody's ability to be written or heard or understood in the modern age is the format. I just feel like the power of the format is something that I

Interviewer 32:38
Mhm.

Seamus 32:42

actively seek out articles on. There's an agency called Story Things whose newsletter I've subscribed to for many years now. They're a content marketing agency. They'll probably describe themselves in less of a commercialised manner, but that's basically what they are. And they have been banging on about formats forever and ever and ever. Pre-subway takes and all these like viral formats.
They were just talking about the importance of finding a particular perspective, right, on a particular...
theme, topic, industry, sector, and approaching it in a novel way, in an original way, whether that's through like a three-minute audio bulletin every day, whether it's through a moving image piece, whether it's through a slideshow with audible captions, like there has to be a way for you to
to sort of catch the attention of somebody who you feel is going to be interested in your topic and is going to be of a like mind to you. There needs to be an, how do you describe it? There needs to be like an adaptability, like an agility to the way that you're willing to present your ideas.

Interviewer 33:41
Mhm.
Yeah, yeah. And also, I guess, like, we need the capacity to be able to learn that skill to be able to engage too, right?

Seamus 33:59
Yeah, yeah, that's why I shared an article with my mentee the other day, and I obviously had to like be quite focused on the career side of things, because sometimes I'm a bit too focused on, like, I want to help this person find their place in the world, which is a lovely thought. But at the end of the day, the mentors are there to help people find their career path, which I find, which it sits uneasily with me because I'm no longer really a professional.
journalist like I'll always be a journalist at heart. What my career is going to evolve into now I do not know because we know. Pardon?

Interviewer 34:25
Mhm.
What did you know?
What do you do now?

Seamus 34:32
I would describe myself as a freelance writer. Like I never wanted to be pegged down to one particular strand of professional writing. That's why I started exploring creative writing. That's why I started playing with poetry. These are the things I learned from being a mentor at a writing school in East London. I thought these kids can be trying to do these things, you know, boldly.

Interviewer 34:48
Mm.

Seamus 34:51
without fear, 10, 11, 12 years old, then why shouldn't I? So I've been exploring, I've been trying to stretch the definition of writer right for the past 10, 15 years. Whereas if you asked me 10, 15 years ago, I would be like, oh, I'm A journalist or I'm A copywriter, I want to be a copywriter. But I just think right now I want to find

Interviewer 34:56
Yeah.

Seamus 35:11
interesting, original, unusual ways of using words to develop ideas and to bring understanding and to bridge divides. You know, that to me is what I'm interested in right now. But I sent the article to my mentee and this person said in one very clear line, the journalist of the future is going to be someone that knows how to be a journalist, but also knows how to

Interviewer 35:20
Yeah, make.

Seamus 35:32
be a content creator, like where those two meet, the axis of those two is really your best hope, I think, of building a sustainable career as someone that is journalistic.

Interviewer 35:42
Mhm.
Yeah.

Seamus 35:46
That's why we're looking at TikTok videos. That's why we're looking at audio essays. All these different approaches, all these different formats. Again, you can't just rely on the hope that you will make a career as a journalist who produces written copy.

Interviewer 36:01
Yeah, it's much, much more complex. Well, thank you so much for your insights. And it's also nice to meet you because I'm also from South London. So it's good to hear that you're like keen on building that community and like on Substack and sharing knowledge. I like that. I'm going to plan to do that when I get there.

Seamus 36:04
Yeah.
Oh, well.
Well, not only that, I'm part of the local, I'm part of the local group that are bringing South East London's first community owned music venue. It's certainly Lewisham's first community owned music venue. It's called System Midnight. You ever heard of System Midnight? So there's a prop, there's an old working man's club in central Catford that we've got a 16 year.

Interviewer 36:32
I haven't.

Seamus 36:38
rent free lease for by the council. So we're renovating that at the moment and the idea is that we'll present all different styles of music and it will also be a bit of a community space, community centre, youth club, there'll be a cafe in the annex and then there'll be recording studios for the radio station in the third phase in a year or two on the first floor.

Interviewer 36:40
Yeah.
Sounds amazing.
What, what, when is it planning on being? Okay, what's it called?

Seamus 36:59
So...
October, it opens in October, roughly.
Sister midnight.org. So SISTER, sister midnight.org.

Interviewer 37:11
Okay, that sounds very interesting.

Seamus 37:12
So there are lots of people in the community have bought shares. I think there's like 30, 40% of the shareholders are from South East London.

Interviewer 37:19
Yeah.

Seamus 37:20
and like 30%, 20% specifically from Lewisham. But we're trying to be as representative of our

immediate environment and community as we can. And we're looking into the governance very, very closely, trying to

Interviewer 37:33
Mhm.

Seamus 37:34
probe what the possibilities are of a different model of ownership in a world that's obviously removed.

Interviewer 37:39
I like kind of cooperative style. Yeah. And have you reached out to like local like youth clubs and charities to like, yeah.

Seamus 37:40
Yeah, yeah, in a world of...
In the process of doing it now, so there's myself and a colleague, I guess we're the unofficial youth engagement leads. So again, that's possibly where my future might lie in some form of youth engagement or facilitation in more of an official capacity. But yeah, right now we're trying to build bridges with schools, colleges, music charities.

Interviewer 37:59
And.

Seamus 38:07
with a view to holding some kind of sessions and workshops in the next 6 to 12 months.

Interviewer 38:07
Rossi.
Yeah. Well, if you, I used to work at a youth centre in Brixton for the Baytree Centre. It's for women and girls. If you ever need a link there, I'm happy to make an introduction.

Seamus 38:23
No, that's amazing. What's it called? The Bay Tree.

Interviewer 38:25
The Bay Tree Center.

Seamus 38:30
Nice, I'll look it up. Brilliant.

Appendix B.5: Interview with Mary
23 April 2026, 02:16pm
39m 27s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

Interviewer 0:04
Okay, so yeah, just to get your consent that you're okay for me to use the audio just for the purposes of the research.

Mary 0:11
Yes, I give my consent.

Interviewer 0:13
Great, thank you. So we're going to start simple and basically if you can just tell me a bit about your use of Substack, why you downloaded it and how long you've been using it for.

Mary 0:26
Definitely. So actually, my first use of Substack also comes down to Greece, funny enough. I was, yeah, I had met just by random happenstance in a Greek tavern on a small island off of Athens, this woman who had done these really amazing environmental journalism products.

Interviewer 0:32
Gaia.

Mary 0:45
projects. And so I was actually doing an interview quite similar to this at a Greek Taverna, and she kind of came over and introduced herself. And she was telling me about how she would share, obviously, like her long form journalism on Substack and how she kind of like really gained an amazing audience and had all these really amazing opportunities pop up through sharing her long form, her long form work. I think now she's

Interviewer 0:51
Excuse me.

Mary 1:09
like working on a book. She's, you know, doing really, really well for herself. And it kind of came from this kind of dissatisfaction or fatigue with the traditional journalism field. And so, you know, when I, you know, when I was speaking to her, we kind of shared a lot of our

sentiments is that right now the state of journalism and the state of like kind of traditional, you know, legacy media outlets,

Interviewer 1:11
Yeah.
Mhm.

Mary 1:34
is a bit bleak for many journalists, especially if you're trying to break into the field. Now there's so much, like fewer opportunities for long-form journalism, for environmental journalism, especially now in this new administration in America at least. And it's kind of really hard to, I guess, find the right outlet for your platform anymore.

Interviewer 1:49
Yeah.

Mary 1:57
I also started freelance journalism maybe about 2 1/2, three years ago after I finished my masters. And that has also been very much a difficult process. So it's a lot slower. It's very much kind of like shooting in the dark sometimes with your pitches. And so I decided because, you know, I'm doing this freelance
situation as well, is that alongside that, I wanted to start a sub stack where I was able to, you know, actually share what my ideas, share my writing, and just kind of see where that goes and just kind of have an outlet that people can see and people can reach. And it was more about for me kind of like creating my own portfolio, creating my own clips from this.

Interviewer 2:26
Student.

Mary 2:41
But since then, it's kind of grown into more being able to like share with the community. And fortunately, in the last couple of years, Substack as a platform has kind of grown in its validity in the journalism circles. So a lot of people now in journalism know Substack is, you know, it is a viable option for journalists. It's really hard, obviously, if you're going to make it.

Interviewer 2:54
Mhm.

Mary 3:02
your whole your whole career, but now it's it is considered or it's looked at as, you know, kind of

an alternative to traditional media, but it's not necessarily, you know, just like Instagram or like WordPress blog. It has some validity to it, which is which is very nice.

Interviewer 3:18
Interesting. So then, so you're writing articles and also reading, and would you say that you would get some of your news from that if you kind of consider it to be like of a journalistic type?

Mary 3:30
Yes, there are some people that I follow that I consider to be, you know, very, you know, trustworthy outlets of environmental knowledge. And obviously if there's anything that I'm kind of, that strikes me as a bit odd or I want to have some sort of background, I'll research that after to make sure that because Substack, as you know, doesn't have that kind of traditional legacy media

Interviewer 3:39
Mhm.

Mary 3:54
you know, cheques and balances in place. You don't have an editor, so you don't have fact checkers. So you kind of, you're trusting these people to be their own fact checkers, which for the most part has done well for me. But sometimes if something strikes me as a bit odd, I'll look it up. But there's like, you know, especially for the climate news, obviously Emily Atkins is one of the leading, you know, leading substacks in the climate

Interviewer 3:55
Yeah, verification.
Room.

Mary 4:17
year with her newsletter heated. I look a lot at like earthly education. There's a couple of other like creators that I've followed that I do see as more of, you know, kind of new sources rather than the other side of Substack, which is a lot of, you know, personal essays or personal experiences and those.
Kind of have their their form, so I do obviously read a lot of regular, you know, traditional media, so I do cheque the news every single day, unfortunately, and then yeah, I do, I do see Substack as you know, an opportunity. I do, I do love a good long form.

Interviewer 4:49
Yeah, because it's done.

Mary 4:56
Substack just piece and if it's timely and newsly, I love it. So I also find the writing a little bit more refreshing than traditional reporting as well.

Interviewer 4:59
Yeah.
And it's interesting you mentioned the validity and so sometimes you might check on things if you're not so sure. Can you speak a bit more about that experience? How do you know whether to trust an author and how can you compare that to trusting people in the mainstream as well?

Mary 5:25
Yeah, well, that is, you know, it's like with that kind of grey area, it's really based on a gut feeling. I'm going to be honest, I don't fact cheque every single thing that I read on Substack, but I think for certain authors, there's more of a, there's more of a trust and maybe that has, maybe that's like not necessarily the best
way to put it, maybe it's not necessarily just their subscriber count or it's not necessarily, you know, just their background, but they've kind of created a relationship and kind of a, yeah, like a sense of responsibility with their audience that I feel quite solid about. But I think if something strikes me as either a bit odd or...

Interviewer 5:59
Yeah.

Mary 6:07
You know, statistics are a little bit crazy. Obviously, in the climate space, there are crazy statistics. And so sometimes I'll check them. For the most part, honestly, they've been right. So like all the things that I've like looked up, I was like, oh, wow, like this. Yeah, and so.

Interviewer 6:20
Yeah.
I can agree.

Mary 6:26
Compared to traditional media, I feel like in some ways it's quite similar. Obviously, traditional media, you have fact checkers, you have editors, but over the last several years, there's been kind of this distrust I've felt with legacy media, especially say like New York Times or yeah, that's that one's nobody's favourite right now.

Interviewer 6:39

Mm.
Mhm.

Mary 6:48
because of things they've published or because the angles they've taken on certain issues, they're kind of more associated with, you know, certain party in the US, et cetera. So, I mean, I've read legacy media pieces where I've had to go and fact cheque them. And I was like, wow, this is poorly done. How did this ever go to print?

Interviewer 7:06
Yeah.

Mary 7:07
So, but I think there's, yeah, it's I think in a similar way that I have relationships to different legacy media outlets. I have different relationships to certain Substack creators and certain levels of trust.

Interviewer 7:23
Yeah. And even if then you're writing yourself, like, are you making sure that you have a specific process to make sure that you're giving other people correct information?

Mary 7:35
Yes, so I was like very formally trained in my master's programme and in my undergrad, you know, it's just citation, citation, citation. And so I think when I originally began, I was very, I was very eager with sharing my citations and all these.

Interviewer 7:53
Yeah.

Mary 7:53
and all these fact checks, but yeah, personally, I know I feel very strongly that I, if I want to foster a relationship with my audiences, I need to be able to provide them factual information. And so a lot of times I'm not necessarily doing hard reporting.
on my work. I'm doing kind of essays about certain topics. But I will always try to kind of like look for, you know, different voices on the same topic and, and share my citations when I can, you know, share that, share that kind of, yeah, those resources for people. But it is obviously an element of trust. I don't necessarily have all of my citations like listed on

Interviewer 8:30
Mmh.

Mary 8:36
every single newsletter. You can believe that they're there, they're in my Google Doc, but I just, yeah, it's very important to me. And yeah, that's why I tried to approach it a little bit more honestly, but it is, I think, down to trust and if your audience kind of trusts you.

Interviewer 8:50
Yeah.
Yeah, I agree. And you have to kind of build that casual energy, otherwise it does become too formal, right? Like mainstream media. Yeah. And this is a bit more specifically like about a memory, if you have a specific one, and if not, you can just answer more generally. But do you remember the last

Mary 9:01
Yeah.

Interviewer 9:13
article or the last couple articles you read and can you describe to me how you engaged with it? That might be like how you read it or if you commented or did anything with it afterwards.

Mary 9:25
Yes, I think the last couple ones I read were not necessarily very newsy. So I, you know, I'm more in, I'm environment, but I also am in travel. And so there were a couple of travelogs. I think it was Kayla Doris's, I can't remember, it was something about Jamaica. I had re-shared it. So

Interviewer 9:35
And.

Mary 9:43
Oh yeah, so I re-shared it. I, Kayla writes on a lot of similar topics to mine, and so we've kind of like had a rapport back and forth for a while. So I really enjoy her writing and she's, you know, been a supporter of mine before. And so it's always great to see similar topics. So yeah, her piece on Jamaica really aligned with.

Interviewer 9:43
Yeah.

Mary 10:03
with what I write about. And so when I was really eager to read it and to see like, you know, like how she like wrote this, wrote this really interesting story. And then also to kind of, I was

looking at to share, yeah, to share some bits that might be interesting to my audience as well, because if people are interested in sustainable travel, like, you know, you can look at.

Interviewer 10:20
Yeah.

Mary 10:23
look at Kayla's articles for that as well. Actually, there was another, oh gosh, I think her name is Catherine. I'll have to like look it up, but it was a very silly article about birds. So we had a conversation about how silly birds are. So it's just a very one-off thing in my notes.

Interviewer 10:37
Yeah.
And.

Mary 10:44
And I had said something about birds and this woman, I think her name is Catherine, I'll have to double check. She messaged me and be like, birds are just silly, you know, they're just silly little freaks. And I was like, I agree. And I was like, we need more stories about birds. And she went and she wrote a story about a bird and it was really long and it was so entertaining.

Interviewer 10:57
Right.

Mary 11:03
And I was like, this is, this is amazing. But it was funny because it came from that, like just a random, yeah, random comment on a substack note. And it just like struck her in a way that she was like, you know what? I'm going to write about the birds. And she even mentioned me in her in her introduction.

Interviewer 11:08
Discussion.
Yeah.

Mary 11:21
And she's like, we just had this silly interaction and I'm gonna write, I'm gonna write this story. And I loved it. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I think I like howled out loud at one of the lines. I think it had to do with like, yeah, it was, yeah, it was, it was, it was something quite silly, but yeah, it was.

Interviewer 11:35
I'm gonna have to read it.

Mary 11:41
So yeah, both, I kind of use Substack as, you know, learning about things and like learning about people's experiences and long form, long form both like reporting, but also like long form travel articles. And then also these like really moments of silliness that I was actually just talking to like a legacy climate media editor the other day.

Interviewer 11:54
Mmh.

Mary 12:04
And I told him, I was like, we need, we need more whimsy. We need more silly articles. And he's like, I agree, but it is just, it's like a bit hard in these kind of like trying times. Yeah, I don't know if you read the, if you read the Atlantic much, but the,

Interviewer 12:11
Yeah.
Yeah, entertainment is good.

Mary 12:24
recent front article page is was by Katie Weaver and it was about her 11,000 word article of her finding the best restaurant free bread in America. And so people in like, yeah, like free bread. So you go to sit down at a restaurant and they give you free bread.

Interviewer 12:31
Yeah.
Three Reps.
But free bread.
Right, that's funny, yeah, yeah.

Mary 12:43
And Katie is, yeah, Katie is a fantastic, fantastic writer. But people were like upset. They're like, this is literally the Atlantic. Like you should be publishing hard news stories. And then they kind of came back and was like, you know what? We like, we need this. Like we need silliness sometimes. We need kind of a break from the incessant gloom and doom

Interviewer 12:55

Play.
Yeah.

Mary 13:04
like the incessant doom and gloom. And so, yeah, that story ran on the front page of The Atlantic. And they say long form is dead, but Katie wrote a 11,000 word piece about bread. So, yeah, you can take risks.

Interviewer 13:11
I love that.
Yeah.
No, and I think it's good to calm down some of the news and hear different things and yeah, be able to relax a bit. Do you think that Substack offers that kind of space for more casual knowledge sharing that can actually be beneficial, like in terms of your emotions and your mental wellbeing?

Mary 13:37
Absolutely, I think. So when I cheque news, I kind of intentionally cheque it to see what's going on. But when I checked Substack, a lot of it is not that. So a lot of it is like, oh, I just, I follow some really amazing photographers. I get to see pretty pictures. And then, yeah, like seeing kind of silly notes or reading bird essays. And so

Interviewer 13:54
Yeah.

Mary 13:59
A lot of it is a little bit of a, yeah, like a step back from the doom and gloom. Obviously there is doom and gloom on there. I do read some of that, but I do try to like seek a balance between both enjoyment and then learning. Yeah.

Interviewer 14:03
A mix.
It's good.
Yeah. And you're also talking about some of the people that, like the woman who wrote the bird essay, you had a conversation before. How often do you feel like you're engaging with other people? And can you tell me a bit more about relationships that you might build on Substack?

Mary 14:29
Yeah, so honestly, I didn't know this when I first started out, like your relationships are kind of everything on Substack. One, it's, you know, people say like, oh, to get followers, you have to

have relationships or things, but just from the human point of view, like you're putting yourself out there constantly and a lot of times you're not, you know, you're not getting a tonne of views or you're not getting a tonne of
sort of likes, you don't have that support. And it does take a lot of work to write all of these essays. And so just having somebody in the comments being like, I really enjoyed this, or like, you're a really, you know, great writer, or I always look forward to your piece. Like, I remember one time somebody sent me, or like, I think she commented on one of my pieces saying, this was the reason that I was able to finish mine. Like, you gave me inspiration to actually finish my piece on a similar topic.

Interviewer 14:54
No.

Mary 15:15
And that meant the world to me, honestly, because I was like, if there's anything I can do is just to be an inspiration or, you know, to support someone else's work in like that tangible way. And so, yeah, we still follow each other and like I interact with her pieces as well. And I think you're, and yeah, maybe it's parasocial relationships, but I find I do have like friends on Substack now where I'm like, oh my gosh, I know.
you and like, you know, we were talking about this the other day and we're, you know, my mutuals and some of them have like reached out to do some collaboration pieces, which I'm excitedly looking forward to. Yeah, so it does, it is a lot, it is a lot, like it is very important I think to have those have those relationships that I found that a lot of people are quite.

Interviewer 15:49
I think.
Yeah.

Mary 16:01
genuine because Substack, well, not as a whole, but at least my little corner of Substack draws a lot of people who are, you know, very interested in the same subjects and very interested in creation. So putting yourself out there so they know how difficult it is.

Interviewer 16:14
Mhm.
And has there ever been a time where all this engagement and relationship building or community building online has also taken place offline or something that you've read online, you've then used in the real world?

Mary 16:32

Yeah, I actually was just at a conference last week for environmental journalists and the amount of the number of people I've seen who have substacks. I was like, wow, I've never, I've never seen that many people in substack. It was like, just, it was like a normal, you know, conversation. It wasn't this kind of like, oh, and maybe you can do substack on the side. It was part of the conference.

Interviewer 16:45
Really.
It's interesting.

Mary 16:55
which I thought was remarkable, but kind of showed now like substax validity. Well, you can look at it two ways. It's either, you know.

Interviewer 16:55
No.
What was the name of the conference?

Mary 17:02
It was the Society of Environmental Journalists and I actually got, so funny enough, I, nobody in my real life knows I post on Substack. Some people know I have a blog. Some people have found me because now if you Google me, this comes up. But I have kept that.

Interviewer 17:12
Okay, yeah.

Mary 17:21
very much to myself because, yeah, because that's how I function. I don't think I could do that if it was a bunch of people I know just because of how my anxiety works. But I thought it was remarkable to meet so many people in person who then wanted to either follow me or read my work and...

Interviewer 17:30
Yeah.

Mary 17:41
on the surface level, I'm like, oh my god, thank you. And then behind the scenes, I'm like screaming internally because I was like, no one can know about this. It's like, but.

Interviewer 17:50
Yeah, it feels like a very personal thing.

Mary 17:53
Very personal, yeah. And so sometimes if someone, I just had somebody else message me being like, oh my god, I read your substack piece, my stomach drops. I was like, oh no. But in a good way, like people have been super positive and super supportive. But yeah, there's another level of putting yourself out there that

Interviewer 18:03
I think we could.
Yeah.

Mary 18:14
I, you know, maybe, maybe you know how that is, but yeah, yeah, so I met some people in person and it's been weird, but a good weird.

Interviewer 18:14
Push it on.
I...
And a bit more about the conference. So they were speaking about like the benefits of Substack in terms of getting the message across.

Mary 18:32
Yes, they had a whole session actually. And maybe this will show you the state of journalism now is like how you to make money off of your newsletter or how you can actually grow a climate newsletter that's self-sustaining. And, you know, almost the queen of Substack, Emily Atkins herself was there. And so she was able to speak about her journey through that. And it's obviously a difficult journey. And

Interviewer 18:48
The.

Mary 18:56
A lot of people in the room were obviously there to kind of see if this is like a viable option for them. Though they were definitely did not shy away from how much work is involved and how much unpaid work, especially up front. And so there's kind of that barrier to entry. But it was, yeah, it was really great to even speak to people who are thinking about.

Interviewer 19:08
Yeah.

Mary 19:16
A lot of these people were thinking about starting a newsletter or thinking about newsletters. And so I think we all should be thinking more about newsletters, but I'm a little bit biased.

Interviewer 19:24
I agree. I agree as well. And then slightly back to the reading articles, is there ever been a time where you haven't quite understood something or you found the topic quite difficult? And how do you approach this? Do you continue reading or do something else?

Mary 19:27
Yeah.
I found in my experience, like Substack to be quite accessible reading. I'm also from, like from my academic background, I've had to read really, really difficult texts. And so I was kind of trained to be able to be able to do that. There are several pieces that I've come across because obviously anybody can start a Substack and post on there and there's.

Interviewer 19:54
Mm.

Mary 20:05
you know, you don't have to be from, you know, certain political ideology, et cetera, that I've haven't agreed with or I've seen this and kind of was like, I can see where this person, like what kind of logic this person is using and I don't necessarily agree with it. And so, you know, sometimes if I'm not enjoying an article, I'll just kind of like click off like any other article.
Um, I've, yeah.
I've never, yeah, I've never like, I don't think left a comment if I disagreed with something. I'll kind of like keep it in my mind of like, oh, you know, that's their opinion and I'll leave it at that. But yeah, unfortunately.

Interviewer 20:36
Okay, yeah.
That's interesting, you do get perspectives that you don't agree with on your feed.

Mary 20:47
Yes, all the time now. And some people will comment that they don't agree with my stuff. And that's like super fine. And if I think they approach it from a nice way, we can have like a nice

conversation about it so I can explain my position. Though, yeah, and then you always get the like weird off either hate comments or, you know, just kind of.
like little, little disgusting things. I did notice though, I mean, this is all I realised last week that, you know, Andrew Tate was on the best sellers list. So there is that kind of like very disgusting and abhorrent, you know, you know, giving a platform to these.

Interviewer 21:17
Yeah, I had Gaia.

Mary 21:26
to these individuals who espouse these really disgusting ideas. And so I've seen, it's like the minority of the things on my feet, thankfully, but, you know, some transphobia, some homophobia, like some misogynist ********. And I know a lot of those people are just kind of trying to get a rise out of people. So for the most part, I don't interact, like interact, but

Interviewer 21:47
Mmh.

Mary 21:50
If there is a position where I see somebody like saying something transphobic, I will try to put them in their place. But yeah, for the most part, I try to not, I try to not engage unless it would, unless it would be more beneficial if I do. But yeah, it is, it is a bit disconcerting.

Interviewer 21:56
Yeah.

Mary 22:09
Um, that Substack has a platform for these type of people, and yeah, if people have been...

Interviewer 22:13
Mm.
And that you're seeing it as well.

Mary 22:17
Yeah, yeah, and definitely like the vast majority of the things I see here, I think a lot of time, you know, are not, are not that, you know, I also post about, you know, climate. So I get a lot of climate people that post about travel, which is usually a little bit, you know, like less offensive.
Well, some things are less offensive and so I keep to that. I'm not interacting with the misogynist gym bros. But yeah, it is a bit disappointing that Substack has a Nazi problem. That should not, that shouldn't be a sentence we have to say.

Interviewer 22:42
Yeah.
Yeah, no, it's scary. And when you're reading articles and you're building opinions off of them or not, do you find that it's easy or difficult in other things that might influence this idea of building informed opinions that could be related to the app or related to yourself?

Mary 22:52
Yeah.
Would you mind repeating the question one more time?

Interviewer 23:15
Yeah, so if you're reading stuff like any, let's say it's a climate thing and you're building an opinion on it, do you feel like the app supports or hinders you in creating an informed opinion? Or do you think it's also something that you have to work for yourself?

Mary 23:22
Mhm.
Ohh, that is that is actually a really good question. Um, I think...
It most definitely is something you have to work for yourself. And I think it's also in the same vein that you approach any sort of media, any sort of news, any sort of information. Nowadays, I think discerning between, you know, discerning ideas or holding conflicting ideas or being able to kind of understand an office point of view,
comes from, you know, I think honestly, years of years of practise of engaging with with news and maybe opinions you don't agree with or just kind of like writing in general. And so, you know, reading is a skill and, you know, analysis is a skill. And so like those are things that I think I've.

Interviewer 24:00
Mm.

Mary 24:20
I've built throughout my life up to this point. I think the Substack app itself does not necessarily do that. I think that comes from comes from the person. I think the Substack app will allow you to engage with different, you know, different opinions or different.

Interviewer 24:22
Yeah.

Mary 24:40

kind of backgrounds, you know, like, or different kind of, you know, expertise backgrounds. But I think that Substack itself, I mean, I'm not, I'm not like completely blind for the fact that Substack is a form of social media. It is an algorithm. And you see a curated feed as well. And it's less, I think,

Interviewer 24:56
Mmh.

Mary 25:03
obtrusive as like a TikTok or an Instagram, but it is still curated towards your interests. And so I find that Substack does give me, especially in terms of like new readers or new writers, think people that write on similar topics often are from similar backgrounds to mine, often, you know, post on
about similar things and I don't think that that's an accident. I think that that's because of the algorithm. So I haven't necessarily had to, you know, really reach across the platform and have to like, you know, engage with somebody completely, completely different. The other thing is you obviously you choose who you are.

Interviewer 25:27
Mm.

Mary 25:41
who you subscribe to, you choose who you read. And so I think it is quite curated in that way. And I don't think the platform itself or the app does anything particularly remarkable to introduce you to new opinions. It is kind of, you know, just another, it is another form of social media.

Interviewer 25:54
Um...
Yeah, interesting. So this is the sort of last section now and we're going to speak a bit more about attention and like related to reading longer stuff. Do you recall the last few articles that you read on Substack and were you able to finish them in one sitting? How is your focus?

Mary 26:18
Oh yeah, that's it. That's an interesting, that's an interesting topic too, because yeah, so like I mentioned, I did read Kayla's article yesterday while I was on the train and then I believe, I believe her name is Catherine, the bird article yesterday. And so I can say, obviously I can't recall the names of any of these things. I'm actually...

Interviewer 26:38
This is.

Mary 26:39
I have a terrible memory when it comes to like names and recognition like that. But yeah, I did finish them and I got, I think, the general gist. And so I'm like, I think now my reading comprehension is kind of like at that point where I'm like, I read it.

Interviewer 26:44
Bye.
Anything.

Mary 27:00
I go through there and I get the general gist. So my attention, well, not to get super personal, my attention, like, especially with social media, has gone quite low. And so I've been off of Instagram, I've been off of, you know, I've never had really TikTok or anything. So I'm off of those like short form contents.

Interviewer 27:16
Okay.

Mary 27:20
But even sometimes I think the Substack notes feed kind of replaces that to me. So I find myself scrolling. And if you ask me about anything I scrolled past, I wouldn't be able to tell you. I'd be like, well, there was a really pretty picture of a beach or like, you know, I saw a funny note about this. But I think that short form outlet of Substack.

Interviewer 27:29
Okay.

Mary 27:42
I definitely do not recall very much. Yeah, I enjoy it, but I don't recall very much. But I think, yeah, I can recall the general gist of articles, but I did finish them. I was able to, and they were both quite long, so.

Interviewer 27:44
Yeah.
Same comparison.
Yeah.
And are there things that might influence how much attention you afford to a particular article? Like that, like, is it, yeah, if you could talk about that.

Mary 28:09
I think obviously, if it's very interesting to me, I'll give it a lot more attention if it's on a topic that I particularly, I particularly love or engage with. Actually, another one, which is a little bit out of my wheelhouse in terms of climate and environment, but
This creator named Jimena, she writes about, I think she's, she's like eco-Marxism or, you know, like more philosophical writing. And her work is beautiful, but it's also quite, you know, quite, it's quite dense and it's very long. And I find myself just because of how beautiful her writing is and

Interviewer 28:30
Mm.
Sense.

Mary 28:50
she's dealt with like a lot of authors that I've read in my past. I find myself like really glued to that screen, even though objectively it's talking about philosophy and it's very long form and it's very like, you know, it's very conceptual. And so I think it's a hard read, but because the writing is so good, I really enjoy it. And she, yeah,

Interviewer 29:00
Yes, interesting.

Mary 29:10
she's great. So that was something I read. It wasn't yesterday, it was the day before. And yeah, could I recall? I was, could I recall exactly what it is? I think again, it's like mostly general gists. Yeah, I think actually that one was about, he had doom scrolling. So that's really applicable. Yeah.

Interviewer 29:24
Eleanor.
But it's interest.
Really.
Yeah. And it's interesting you talk about that, the eco-Marxist article and like that you were really drawn to it and you're really glued to the screen. When this kind of thing happens to you, like your attention is really focused on an article. Do you have any like memories of it having like a particular effect on you? Like might you have used

Mary 29:32
Yeah.

Interviewer 29:54
that focus and that attention after the article in a beneficial way.

Mary 29:59
Hmm, that's a good one. Yeah, I think...
I think the reading subs like subs tech articles in the long form ones feel more like reading books or reading like hard, you know, like longer, longer form media for me. And so I feel less inclined to just go back to the scroll. You know, I probably won't just like click out of that and go to another article. I would probably like.

Interviewer 30:17
Mm-hmm.
Well, my.
Yeah.

Mary 30:37
just like reading along from peace. I'm either going to be continuing reading or I'm going to be like, all right, I can focus on something a little bit analogue right now. Yeah.

Interviewer 30:37
Yeah.
Yeah. So then my final two questions are a bit more abstract. So if you can just get creative if you have any ideas. But more broadly, for yourself and for others, what do you think the value of paying attention to a longer article is?

Mary 30:54
Yeah.
Oh my gosh, there's so much value in it. I think actually we need more long form article because, or long form articles, long form, you know, media because you can get so much more in depth into it. And as, you know, as somebody who's reported, like I'm also a reporter, I...
There's so many details, there's so many aspects about a certain topic that you can't really get into in a short form piece. If I only have 800 words to tell you a whole story, I'm going to be, you know, using my words very sparingly. I'm going to be using, I'm going to be very quick and you're not going to get that level of detail, that level of nuance. I think longer form report.

Interviewer 31:37
Thank you.

Mary 31:45

reported pieces are oftentimes people spend a lot more time researching them. There's a lot more effort that goes into it. And you can just get so much more of a rich story. I personally love long form pieces. That's like my favourite thing. That's what I want to do is like do more long form, obviously.

Interviewer 32:03
Yeah, same.

Mary 32:08
very difficult in today's day and age. But yeah, it's kind of like you can see a lot more of the artistry, not necessarily just in the writing, but in the research, in the analysis, in the editing, in the voice that comes through with long form. So I personally love them and think that they are a huge value to society and that

Interviewer 32:19
Okay.

Mary 32:30
Yeah, I mean, even with Kay's piece about bread, now everybody's talking about restaurant bread, you know, it's like, it does leave that lasting, that lasting impression and you can have, yeah, so much, so much more value to it than just quick reported pieces.

Interviewer 32:35
Yeah.
Has an effect.
Yeah.
And do you ever feel a sense of responsibility for the things that you're reading and sharing with others on Substack or online?

Mary 32:57
Yes, absolutely. So I kind of won't share an article unless I, not necessarily completely agree with it, but think it is of value to share in things. And so, yeah, I've had like people message me being like, hey, could you please, you know, share my article or things like this?
And I'm always loving to like connect with other people and read it. But then if I read it and I'm kind of like, well, yeah, I don't necessarily feel like this is kind of the image I want to share with my audience or like this is necessarily the view I would feel comfortable with my audience like engaging with. I won't. I think, again, it's all about your credibility and

Interviewer 33:18

Yeah.
Mm-hmm.

Mary 33:41
Yeah, I don't want to just be one of those like, I'll share whatever you share if you share mine or like, I'm going to do this. I think it, you know, I do feel very particular about my writing in the space that I've created for myself and I want to be able to provide, you know, good space for my audience. So I do feel a lot of responsibility. I also feel a lot of responsibility over the things that I post. And so.

Interviewer 33:46
Hey.

Mary 34:04
especially because I don't have, you know, I don't have fact checkers, I don't have editors. I, you know, if I'm saying a claim against something or other, I want to make sure that I actually can support it and it's not going to be like kind of in a deAbenatory way or, you know, I'm very particular about my language that I use and the stories that I actually publish.

Interviewer 34:17
Mm-hmm.

Mary 34:27
for those reasons as well.

Interviewer 34:27
Yeah. Yeah. Okay, great. And then my final comment is just if there's anything that we haven't discussed that you think is relevant to the, like how we read and how we share information. I don't know if there's something that we haven't touched upon.

Mary 34:46
I can't think of anything in this moment. I think this is like a fascinating, fascinating research. So the researcher in me is like really excited about this because I do think that you really are onto something that, you know, obviously our media escape has really transformed how we interact with media. It's how we've

Interviewer 34:54
Yeah.

Mary 35:05

It's transformed how quickly we want our news. You know, so many people in the industry have told me the only way you're going to, you know, get anywhere in journalism right now is to do short form content, is to do this kind of like clickbaity, you know, very, very quick video style because no one reads it. Everybody's told me they're like, no one reads anymore.

Interviewer 35:17
Mhm.
Yeah.

Mary 35:26
Then I'm like, people, people can, I promise. Like, you know.

Interviewer 35:29
So, it's a real thing. Like, I think I've just noticed a lot and even I'm trying to get into like writing letters to my friends or like, even if it's like a letter for like a job application, just like trying to create like more creative and longer form ways of
engaging in the world. I think it's really important because I can just see people are getting like jaded by all the shorts done.

Mary 35:54
Oh my god. Brain rot. But in all so many ways, that's how misinformation or like misrepresentation goes very, you know, becomes rampant is because if you only have 30 seconds to actually explain the issue at hand, you're not going to get the nuance of a long form reported.

Interviewer 35:58
Yeah.
Mm.

Mary 36:17
essay, then you also create this space where, you know, you've got news influencers or like journalism influencers. And I'm not saying anybody can't be a journalist, but there are kind of processes that you go through in order to be able to share your story and share these things that you've researched. And so, I mean, just in the past year, there's been so much harm done because some, you know, influencer has created something viral that wasn't necessarily true. And so I think, yeah, I think that.

Interviewer 36:45
Yeah.

Mary 36:49

I'm hoping that we're going to have a shift where people see the value in long form reporting, people's like reported pieces, people see the value in writing in kind of like these long relationships that you have with people and with outlets and things and that, you know, I'm hoping people, you know, now see the value in humans because of AI and that would be

Interviewer 37:01
Mhm.

Mary 37:10
a wonderful thing. Exactly, but he's like, why don't you just ChatGPT this? And I was like, there is going to be a point where we're like, we're so starved for creativity and human connexion and just the humanness of it all that I feel people can will push towards it. But yeah, it'll be definitely on the lower end, not the.

Interviewer 37:11
I love you.
Yeah.
Yeah.
I agree, I agree.

Mary 37:30
Billionaires laying everybody off because of AI, so...

Interviewer 37:33
Yeah, there's a lot of layers to it.

Mary 37:36
Oh my gosh, yes.

Interviewer 37:38
But thank you so much for your insights. That was really useful and really interesting. And I hope you also felt like you got something from the discussion too.

b

Appendix B.6: Interview with Zak
24 April 2026, 03:03pm
56m 34s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

Interviewer 0:04
Okay, so the audio started and I just wanted to grab your verbal concern that you're okay that I use this audio for the purposes of my research only.

Zak 0:14
Yes, I am, I am good.

Interviewer 0:17
And just so you know, it's for a programme at the Global Campus of Human Rights, so you can also have a look at them online and I'm very happy to share with you the research when it's complete. It should be in July. And if there's anything that you're not sure about, just ask me to repeat and we can also go off track.

Zak 0:18
Yes.

Interviewer 0:39
Like if you have something that you feel is worth mentioning, please feel free to talk. It's like more of a casual form of conversation.
So we'll start pretty simple, and I wondered if you could just tell me a bit about why you chose to download Substack in the 1st place, and if you read any other kind of similar content elsewhere.

Zak 1:00
Okay, well, I, I...
Retired four years ago in America, 62, you can retire to get dirty.
And before that, I had worked in the printing business for the last 20 years and did a kind of a boutique mid-range printer that had client software and I was the I managed all the websites for customers, online ordering, pre-press kind of thing.
And so, when I retired, I didn't want anything to do with any of that nonsense, so I planned to sort of do the retired thing, do some artwork, and I began to work on a graphic novel of a memoir.
At a time when I was in the Air Force.
Back in the 80s, early 80s.
And.

illustrate it in the writing, looking for a very easy platform to get into without a large and heavy learning curve. That's why I started getting on.

Interviewer 1:56
Awesome.

Zak 2:08
All right, it got on, because I found it to be probably one of the best designed for that purpose I've seen.
Mm.
I kind of have some expertise in that using all the software that I used at work.
Analysing the systems, so...
And then what was the second part of that question?

Interviewer 2:28
So they used it to tell visual stories rather than writing.

Zak 2:33
No, both. Gonna be writing a story about the time, and it's...

Interviewer 2:35
Both.

Zak 2:40
I sort of saw it as a sort of a gateway, Trojan Horse, if you will, even.
to sort of talk about what I did in the Air Force was I was trained as a weather observer first. This was in 1979.

Interviewer 2:54
Gaia.

Zak 2:58
Um...
And we still had Iranian troops on the Blackland, which was the Air Force Training Base in San Antonio.
So that was all going on, the initial, the first.
First 53 was the first, but...
Anyway.
So I did that, and then I was an observer for three years, and then there was a second track where they send you back to school or actually become a forecaster or a forecaster, and...

So that time of learning, and so I wanted to kind of, I want to use it to, and I'm still working on it. It's not up on Substack because I've been wavering. But once I got in there and got hooked on some of the writers and

Interviewer 3:36
Mhm.

Zak 3:41
I love, it's a great platform. It's the only social media thing that I do. I got off of Facebook a long time ago.

Interviewer 3:46
that you use. Okay.
And how often are you reading online on Substack?

Zak 3:53
My morning routine.

Interviewer 3:55
Okay, everyday.

Zak 3:57
Yeah, about four or five hours, actually.

Interviewer 4:00
And how would you describe it to someone who hasn't used it?

Zak 4:00
Morning, will have.
Well, I I have recently like my brothers, my two brothers. I try to get them on all the time. I think I did get my sister on. Hard to tell. And then a friend of mine recently from my old job. Back to me and I send him stuff all the time.
The same thing. I just basically told you it's a very easy platform. All the best people are there, really. This is the place to get your nodes, I think.

Interviewer 4:33
Yeah.
Yeah, so you would say that you get your.

Zak 4:42

And I do cheque others, I do cheque other sources, but not very much mainstream YouTube, I get, and it's a lot of the times when I'm watching YouTube videos.

Interviewer 4:46
Even.

Zak 4:54
From a connexion to those that.

Interviewer 4:56
Interesting. So is your main source of information, like with other things added on top?

Zak 5:03
Yeah.

Interviewer 5:05
Great, I like that. And what role do you think, you kind of touched on this, but just to extend, what role do you think Substack plays for you personally and also for others if they were to use it?

Zak 5:05
That's correct.
Well, it's a good place to research, I mean.
You're not the first time I've been interviewed. Great last summer I was Grace Brickley. I don't know if you're familiar with her.

Interviewer 5:34
Mm.

Zak 5:34
Um...
Is.
British writer, Marxist, economist, I think.
The vulture capitalism's book is all over the place.
So, she interviewed me for her upcoming book.

Interviewer 5:54
Oh, Grace Blakely.

Zak 5:56
Yeah, great.

Interviewer 5:57
Oh, she interviewed you.

Zak 5:58
Yeah.

Interviewer 5:59
Awesome. How would, like, did she just get in touch with you and what was the conversation about?

Zak 6:04
Well, she, she actually did a, she actually put out a note, she wrote a note.
Basically, put it out there for everybody, and she...
Got a large response because I, when I went to sign up to schedule a meeting with her, she was booked for a couple.
You know, and I jumped on it right away, so it happened right away.
Because the note I saw the note I was on and getting.
She's definitely one of my favourite people. I've subscribed to her.

Interviewer 6:34
Yeah, that's cool. Did you have a good discussion?

Zak 6:39
It was strange, to be honest with you. I mean, the 30-minute segments, and she was, you know, ready to get go on to the next one. Kind of personally, I felt that it was not really that great, not a whole lot of time to get into the things that she wanted to talk about.

Interviewer 6:57
Yeah.

Zak 6:59
And she could have easily just asked questions, and I could have people could respond.
Written, even, I think.

Interviewer 7:08
Okay.

Zak 7:09
I think I think I might have frightened her a little bit. Last time I had my...
And up here, we have a little more of a cabin-like there, so I was in my bedroom, and it's a little box sitting in there.
I think the last thing I were talking about, she asked me about social isolation. I said, yeah, and some people self-isolate. And I said, yeah, that's me. I self-isolate. You self-isolate. And, you know, time was up. I was laughing at myself, like some Ted Kaczynski guy.
I don't know if you know who Ted the Unabomber ever heard of him.

Interviewer 7:45
And.
I don't know who that is, no. Kandinsky. No.

Zak 7:51
You know, anyway, yeah, then it was it was a good discussion altogether, but...

Interviewer 7:55
Do you feel like the discussion that you had was like contributed to part of her book? Like what was the bigger purpose for it?

Zak 8:04
Well, she had the book upcoming book for her was is about individual competitive individualism.
Or what she was researching and she'd asked the list of questions. Only really one of them that I felt applied to me because some of them were like, you know, how have you felt? Basically, she was looking for people to discuss how this idea of individual competition in online spaces.

Interviewer 8:31
Mhm.

Zak 8:33
One of them was in like dating apps and I'm sixty-six, I don't.
I don't use those kind of apps; we did.
All of the questions, specific questions, were not applicable, so we started just telling her.
I started telling her about...
Various incidents.
I can highlight for sure, but I'm a...
Just telling her that.
His capitalism, yeah.

My whole life, I could say many, many incidents typically where I...
It's all about it.

Interviewer 9:14
Yeah.

Zak 9:15
All inclusive, everything we do is...

Interviewer 9:18
It's all related, yeah.

Zak 9:18
Unfortunately, yeah.

Interviewer 9:22
So then now going back to Substack and reading articles, can you remember specifically, or if not more generally, the last couple articles you read and how exactly did you engage with them? And by that I mean like, was it something that you agreed with or you looked more into afterwards or you just
had a quick look. Like, can you tell me about that experience?

Zak 9:47
Yeah, well, the last thing I read was actually a repost. No, actually it wasn't a repost, it was a segment of her of a book by Sarah Kenzier. I don't know if you're familiar with her.

Interviewer 9:47
Yeah.
Can you say the name again?

Zak 9:59
Her last book.

Interviewer 10:03
Okay, so, yeah.

Zak 10:05
OR.
He's written four books, all bestsellers. He's a political anthropologist, PhD who...
was one of the people who actually predicted Trump would win the first time, because that's her

area of expertise. And she's written two of the books, basically on the first. The second book was called Hiding in Plain Sight, which was about him.
Ethically, and America, but...
Yeah, so she posted a just yesterday.
Go see an excerpt from her most recent book.

Interviewer 10:46
Mm.

Zak 10:47
Kevin, her father died. She was having kind of in a period like last month or she was mourning and had to deal with the death of her father and all that stuff.
He's been kind of starting to come back.
Little notes about.

Interviewer 11:04
Okay.
And was it useful to read? Were you enjoying, like, did you finish it all in one sitting?

Zak 11:12
Yeah.

Interviewer 11:13
Yeah.

Zak 11:14
She's definitely my favorite.
Bothered.

Interviewer 11:19
Yeah, you read a lot of, so do you tend to read similar authors or do you have like quite a wide range of authors that you read from?

Zak 11:27
I would say similar. Most of the like Grace Blakely, people that are sort of aligned with my political views. I have been reading, I don't know if you know who Harold.

Interviewer 11:32
Yeah.

Zak 11:40
Harold.
Okay, I think I'm not sure his name. He may be actually...

Interviewer 11:50
Yeah.

Zak 11:50
Thank you so much for where is Room, but anyway, he will post long form notes.
He responds to Grace all the time, and he'll add a little.

Interviewer 12:00
Yeah.

Zak 12:00
Everything.
His notes are basically full length.

Interviewer 12:05
Like a whole article.

Zak 12:07
Oh yeah, they are like a whole article on them.

Interviewer 12:10
Yeah.

Zak 12:10
And I know there's a...
Pretty much it. I will cheque the occasional. Sometimes I don't read all of people's long form articles. You know, I subscribe to Zotayo. I get stuff.
They do video as well.

Interviewer 12:33
Yeah, and the audio too.

Zak 12:34
Ema.
Mhm, mhm.

Interviewer 12:36
And do you ever find that you're reading things with concepts that are new to you or that you might find more difficult? And if this is the case, like what's your response?

Zak 12:48
Play.
Um...
I do read a lot of...
Weather related. I got out of the Air Force and never really worked in weather again, despite being able to, you know, forecast the weather.
There just wasn't any jobs.

Interviewer 13:09
Yeah.

Zak 13:12
Even then, this is like I got out in 85, late 84 actually.
But I've always, the way we're trained, the way they trained us.
For me, anyway, my takeaway from it.
It's in me, in my bones, weather, association with the atmosphere.
In.
Feel it every day, and so I'm always checking it, always looking at the sky, I'm checking the clouds.
Um...
Uhh...
University of Washington has a great website after departments, so I can actually see satellite charts. I do that a lot as well, and that's a big part of what I'm writing about also, so it's research. I subscribe to several of the world's most renowned meteorologists.

Interviewer 13:52
Yeah.

Zak 14:06
Yeah.
James Adamen's on there fairly recently. I'd say the last six months. Come on.

Interviewer 14:12
Mm.

Zak 14:14
If you're not familiar with him, he's 1978, he was the first one to address Congress.
Reading, so I get papers.
Academic papers they link to, so I read a lot of that sometimes afterwards.

Interviewer 14:31
Mhm.

Zak 14:35
A lot of it is just I save a lot of these things.
Best Archive.

Interviewer 14:39
Yeah.
But I'm guessing then it means that this is content that you're quite familiar with. So you don't necessarily have to follow up to understand what you're reading because it makes sense to you because you're interested in it.

Zak 14:41
Year.
Yeah, but I, I mean, I'm sixty-six, so I've acquired a lot of...
A wide variety, and also an artist.

Interviewer 15:03
Mhm.

Zak 15:04
Might sound like a humble brag, I guess, but...
New term, a new term. I'm pretty up on everything. I mean, my bookshelf is...

Interviewer 15:14
Yeah, you're well read.

Zak 15:15
The I like consilience is a something I believe in.
Yeah, like I have cross inter interdisciplinary, I guess it would be the word.

Interviewer 15:28
Mhm.

Zak 15:28
Oh.
Yes, I've read David Graber.

Interviewer 15:33
Yeah, I like David Gruber.

Zak 15:36
Rossi.
Rossi.
The book determined he's a neurobiologist who discovered cortisol as a stress drug back in the late 80s, early 90s.

Interviewer 15:48
Mhm.

Zak 15:53
Pollock.
Yeah, wide variety.

Interviewer 15:56
Yeah, so you have you have a sound knowledge when it comes to reading.

Zak 16:01
I do, and and I do secondary research if I'm really, you know, interested, like, like I said, I if...

Interviewer 16:06
Yeah, if you need.

Zak 16:09
It would be meteorologists post things and then they cite papers. I immediately go and grab them.

Interviewer 16:14
Okay, yeah.

Zak 16:15
Race, race, you know, I cheque all the links typically in any of the posts.

Interviewer 16:19
Okay, so you dig further, yeah.

Zak 16:21
Oh yeah.

Interviewer 16:22
And can you tell me a bit more about your experience when it comes to engaging on Substack? So whether that be commenting or messaging or sharing things, is that something you often do? Can you remember the last time that you did that?

Zak 16:39
Yeah, I usually I usually comment something.
Every time I read something, you know, even if it's just a thank you, great information, you know, whatever.

Interviewer 16:49
Yeah.

Zak 16:52
But, uh...
In the beginning, I did a lot more.
I kind of curtailed my long-form comments.
But I, I actually, in the beginning, I thought I saw it as a way to sort of...
Up my game as far as writing, because I'm not really a writer, although I have...
One of the things I sort of been researching myself for my book is how to write.

Interviewer 17:22
Mm.
Okay, yeah.

Zak 17:24
Ohh, and then I also have written a lot.
My jobs, technical stuff, but...
It was being able to put response there and then actually get response back from other commenters. It's interesting.

Interviewer 17:33

Yeah.
Yeah, it's nice to have the feedback. Have you?

Zak 17:42
When?
Lately, it's just short.

Interviewer 17:46
Okay, yeah.

Zak 17:46
Yeah, I don't really try to.

Interviewer 17:48
Have you ever like built a relationship with someone through Substack or is it usually just like quick messages and then you won't speak to them again? Or is there more of a community feel?

Zak 18:02
I know there's I have not made any connexion with anyone specifically that.
I got a lot of people that follow me.

Interviewer 18:11
Yeah.

Zak 18:13
I find that kind of strange, why I kind of asked you that question, 'cause when someone follows you out of the blue, you're, why, there's no button or no other box that says, this is why I followed you, 'cause I don't have, my publication is enough, you know, I'm not something, and then it'll hit maybe it's not,

Interviewer 18:29
Yeah.

Zak 18:35
necessarily related to...
Um...
Something that I commented on, maybe days after I commented on.
And also mentioned this, there are...
More recently, I have been followed by suspectful.

I suspect to be...
Not forthright.

Interviewer 19:02
Ah, can you expand on that a bit more?

Zak 19:05
Well, you know, they'll have a picture and a lot of times it's women, younger women dressed scantily. So I always, you know, sure why.
Fellows, but...

Interviewer 19:20
Interesting. I haven't seen that.

Zak 19:22
Yeah, and I, I...
I have actually been...
Tempted to someone did attempt to.
Drag me into something more.
I'm pretty.
I'm paranoid.
Realistic.

Interviewer 19:43
Mm.

Zak 19:43
Cautious, but, and they were actually only time I've reported someone to Substack.
It was sent from a Grace Blakely account. It was actually pretty professionally done. And I did get, you know, contacted her to ask her before I, you know, it looked exactly like it was coming from her account, but I could tell. And through the chat.
feature.
And you know, I caught, she's like, no, it wasn't me, and please contact the, you know, suspect, which I did, and then they, about a week later, got back to me and said, yes, I was correct. It was someone.

Interviewer 20:19
Yeah.

Zak 20:26
And user information.

Interviewer 20:30
Okay, yeah, it's interesting then, because I haven't heard yet, then there's a slightly shady space on Substack, which maybe isn't so safe, yeah. And
Have you ever had any experiences where something that you've read online or someone you communicated with, whatever it may be on Substack, specifically related to long form stuff, that you then use that information offline in the real world?

Zak 21:00
Um...
All the time, you know.
Really, I mean.
I try to excuse me.
Explain. I don't really. I don't really have any friends outside. You know, being being an older person and I've kind of made myself like myself isolated. To work on my, you know, my projects. Uh. I'm doing that and I'm also just enjoying being retired. I'm living here in the Pacific Northwest. I live 1000 feet from

Interviewer 21:29
Yeah.

Zak 21:37
a bay and I've taken almost 30,000 pictures in the last five years I've been here. Cloud situation and we actually have a very, it's a very unique.

Interviewer 21:45
Amazing.

Zak 21:50
Well, I will be talking about that eventually. I still haven't decided. I'm still working on the book and I will.

Interviewer 21:59
Mhm.

Zak 22:00
At some point, when it's done, but...

Interviewer 22:03
Well, you mentioned that your brothers, like, would you ever maybe discuss something with them that you found interesting that you read on Substack?

Zak 22:04
Ema.
Ohh yeah, I do, I do.

Interviewer 22:12
Yeah.

Zak 22:14
I try to, anyway.
But...
And I do, there are people in my life, obviously, I have a roommate, this is his house, he's got a family, his daughters.
Now 16, I consider my niece.

Interviewer 22:30
Ohh.

Zak 22:32
We talk about it, and I'll send some people stuff,
My old coworker recently, I think he's probably more inclined because he's curious. But mostly, I found a lot of people are just not engaged. They don't want to hear any bad news. All they know. A lot of climate denial is.

Interviewer 22:47
Okay, interesting.
Yeah.
So some people just aren't even aware. Yeah.

Zak 22:56
I think, I think they're aware.
You know, it's hard not to be aware that.
Bad stuff being happening, but there's a lot of apism happening.

Interviewer 23:08
Yeah.

Zak 23:08
They don't really want to know.

Interviewer 23:10
And do you think you being on Substack prevents you from practising these escapism things? Like, do you think it brings you closer to the truth in a way?

Zak 23:10
I had.
Yeah, I do. Yeah, it helps. Yeah.

Interviewer 23:27
Yeah.
And do you also trust the things that you're reading on Substack? So what is it that allows you to build an informed opinion based off of the things you read?

Zak 23:41
Well, number one, if I see something that I, I'm following people who are easily vetted, mostly. I can go on YouTube, I can see a zillion videos of Grace talking about capitalism.

Interviewer 23:49
Mhm.

Zak 23:56
I know I know a lot about her. DM 25 now.
Oh.

Interviewer 24:06
To following like most of the big accounts.

Zak 24:07
I.
Yeah.
You know, Heather Cox Richardson, you know, who does the nightly history lesson. I read her. I don't really read her every night these days. I used to, but every once in a while I do.
I do check.

Interviewer 24:27
And what makes, yeah, what makes you value it more than mainstream media?

Zak 24:37
No.
I mean, it's pretty easy really to answer with mainstream. Again, 66, news has not been...
I am not a Trumper at all. I'm A Marxist, basically.
Uh...
It's always been.
suspect, it's always, you know, in conservative capital.

Interviewer 25:05
Mm.

Zak 25:07
So it's not really, I mean, I cheque it out, obviously, because you want to keep track of them. Like, for instance, I do still get...
I used to have a sub, I got the New York Times and a Washington Post subscription just so I could keep track.
How they're reporting the news.
That makes sense.

Interviewer 25:26
Yeah.

Zak 25:27
And when I did, finally, okay, I've had enough of that. I stopped paying them. I still get the newsletter every morning with the list. I saved those because you can actually tell by the...
subject heading of the story, you know, kind of where they're...
there telling you. So I don't really, I cheque it, but I don't really give it any credence. I will read an article here and there.

Interviewer 25:53
Mm.

Zak 25:54
But they're light and fluffy.
Best way to describe them.

Interviewer 25:59
Light and fluffy, I like that.

Zak 26:01
At best, no, and usually there's some misinformation at a high level.

Interviewer 26:02
Yeah.
Yeah.

Zak 26:10
You know if that makes any sense.
So.

Interviewer 26:14
Okay. Yeah.

Zak 26:14
And most.
Yeah.

Interviewer 26:17
And then, oh, please continue.

Zak 26:18
Motion.
Go ahead.
Oh, well, the people that I follow are, like I said, they're known.
Fellows, professors, and you know they have degrees and their.
Ohh.
Typically, I don't really follow any artists, which is, you know, interesting. There are a couple that I do. They show up in my notes. I don't really subscribe to any specifics.
Mostly.
you know, political economists, things that I've been really...
Then, world's airs, the weather, climate, climate, people.

Interviewer 27:01
Mhm.

Zak 27:05
A lot of people that are.

Big and that people who've written books that I can actually follow them.
After about the.

Interviewer 27:18
Yeah. Would you ever feel the need to fact cheque what they're saying or you have confidence that they're credible sources?

Zak 27:19
Person.

Interviewer 27:31
Mhm.

Zak 27:32
All of them, because I know who they are, and then I cheque to see what they're doing, where they work, and then I, and then I also, like I said, I grabbed, they make links, I grabbed their scientific papers, I always check.

Interviewer 27:45
Yeah.
Yeah. Okay, thank you. And so this last section is more related to attention and reading longer pieces in comparison to shorter pieces. The last few articles that you read, did you do you read them in one sitting? Like, are you reading them on your phone?
And what's your focus like?

Zak 28:12
Well, it's good. It's actually my morning routine. I'll get up, take my little coffee.
My breakfast, pretty, you know, set in routines, I like disciplined in that way.
And I go back to my room, and then I, you know, I have an iPad, and that's what I use to feed everything, yeah.

Interviewer 28:29
I don't know, Pollock.

Zak 28:33
A little bit bigger, I got a little tiny little.
All.
I do read stuff there, but not much. It depends if I'm out in my car or I'm out with...

Interviewer 28:37
Yes.

Zak 28:43
stuff. But if I do anything on the phone, it's save it for later and then when I have a chance, I'll come back.

Interviewer 28:50
Okay.

Zak 28:51
Like.

Interviewer 28:52
Yeah, so then on the iPad, it's much easier to just read it all in once without getting distracted.

Zak 28:58
Yeah, and I'll, you know.
It depends, you know, like the people on my...
You know, they give you those little icons, I noticed, you know, now that how the you got the flowers, I think they call them.

Interviewer 29:12
Yeah.

Zak 29:14
And mine has a lot of branches.
Or, if you look it up, you'll see that there they have code.
And the more branches, more or leaves, actually, they're like leaves you have.
More subscribers, it depends on.
One is for actual subscriptions to pays, and there's even a way to tell for pay subscription.

Interviewer 29:35
Okay.

Zak 29:40
You click on those little.

Interviewer 29:40

I hadn't realised that that's what it was for. I kept trying to figure out what why the what the flower meant.

Zak 29:45
Yeah, well, I actually, you know, Subsac has the. The support. Good support, you can look stuff up if you need to know how to do something and they they have a good explainer for
For sure, YouTube, the same people will actually post YouTube videos about it, and, and also you can actually click.
Tiny, but you can click it on a person, and it will give you a little pop-up until you...
who they subscribe to sometimes, because you can also see it also actually.
Sometimes it will say hidden. I have two or three that they let you know that they're following, subscribe to, but then they hide some.

Interviewer 30:29
Yeah.

Zak 30:29
But yeah, yeah.

Interviewer 30:32
Interesting. And can you remember a specific article where maybe you weren't focused and you're getting distracted even when you're on your iPad and what might be the reasons for that?

Zak 30:33
Reps.
Okay.
My brain, that happens all the time, actually, even when I'm reading a book and it takes me, I'm a good reader, not necessarily, I don't really believe in really fast reading. Not sure how, and I've seen a lot of information about how to read fast and, you know, just not, I'm not convinced that.
the best way to read. Because I'm often on I read a paragraph and then my brain goes, I have to think about that for a few minutes and it might take me a few minutes and I might have to check.

Interviewer 31:10
Okay, yeah.

Zak 31:21
Go off to another place and.
And it's and it's a kind of a way to cheque my biases.

Interviewer 31:31
Yeah.

Zak 31:31
If I feel like I'm being triggered some way under the dissonance happening, which I think that's me, that's the word I give to it.
It happens A lot.
It actually happened with Grace's book, Vulture Capitalism, when I was reading it. It was in the third.
Third chapter, and I, she's describing all this evil, you know, stuff sort of leading up to.
how horrible they are, and I think to even use the word evil at one point, and then there was a paragraph, well, they're just using their best, they're not evil, they're just something to the effect of saying that these people are not evil, they're just doing, operating with their own self-interest.

Interviewer 32:17
Mhm.

Zak 32:17
And I was kind of like, what? You know, you just said all this stuff and you're giving me all, you're talking about conspiracies, but then I had to think about it for a while.

Interviewer 32:21
And then, yeah.
Okay, yeah, so it's.

Zak 32:30
Integrated.

Interviewer 32:31
So sometimes almost the detail can be quite overwhelming.

Zak 32:37
Yeah.
It doesn't, it doesn't sit, you know, of course we...
Really know enough about these things, I'll...
I know enough that if I am triggered.
But it's something that's going on with me, so I will, I will cheque on that.
Also, let it integrate for a while.
Sleep on it a few days, by the, and then I, you know, then I'll go back and move on, but...

Interviewer 33:08
Yeah.
It makes sense though, I get it. And then these final two questions are a bit more abstract, but what more broadly, both for yourself and for others, do you think the value of paying attention to longer content is?

Zak 33:28
Well, it's always better. I mean, officiality versus that's in depth. I think it's a good way to go.
Um...
And I also just, and I, and I read something recently, I think there was a...
And.
article in Washington Post, it just backed up the research has come out recently about aging, because I am aging.

Interviewer 33:58
Hmm.

Zak 33:58
K.
Somewhat worry about my brain and...
And also the isolation, but he's talking about that.
Familiar with Sara Sara Stein Lubrano?

Interviewer 34:13
Mm.

Zak 34:13
She don't have sex.
American, but she's PhD. She works in Oxford University. Yeah. She just wrote a book about don't talk about politics.
The.
As another other programme that you talked about.
A social atrophy and how your brain actually, you know, shows drinks and...
You don't keep in contact with people, but it's anyway, it's one of the reading and keeping contact and long-form readings specifically is one way to counter that.

Interviewer 34:51
Okay, yeah.

Zak 34:53
One of the, one of the, there's five things, you know, like...

Interviewer 34:53
So it's like...

Zak 34:57
engaging with people, long form reading, be good for you, exercise, obviously. Remember the other two.

Interviewer 35:03
Mhm.
So yeah, you see it as something that's like beneficial for like self-development and brain capacity. Yeah. Makes sense. And do you ever feel a sense of responsibility for the things that you're reading on Substack and that you're then sharing or promoting?

Zak 35:13
Yeah.
Yeah.
And...
Yeah, but that's just my personality.
Responsible for everything, sometimes, sometimes.

Interviewer 35:38
Mmh.

Zak 35:42
I'm trying less and less.

Interviewer 35:45
Can you tell me a bit more about, like, what responsibility you feel?

Zak 35:52
Well, I have, you know...
I have nieces, nephews.
People that I love, so...
It's always been, always been sort of active in that.
Base.
Been an activist, protester.

Oh.
For anti-war protesters.
Um...
Even when I first got out of the Air Force, one of the first things I did was I remember volunteering at a Seattle. I was living in Seattle and they were...
Oh.
Every year, near the university in the university district, they have a big...
A weekend where they, you know, have people selling stuff, but it's also we have a lot of tables.
Room.
Uh.
Signing up to go work for a socialist organization.
And walk around and collect signatures, and they made me wear this sandwich board that had a big picture of the famous photograph.
El Salvador, I believe it was, lying dead on the side of the road, you know, but...
I.
I guess I take it personally. I know realistically, you know.
Only so much that I as a person can do.

Interviewer 37:20
Mm.

Zak 37:20
But I also, that's really kind of the focus of my work. The book that I'm, there's two projects, really. The one is the sort of Trojan horse I kind of spoke about, which is I want people to look at the clouds.
Want them to understand the weather, so they can not deny what's happening.
Maybe we can, I'm trying, I'm attempting to do a different approach as opposed to being in their face. I want them to, I'm going to paint some beautiful pictures.

Interviewer 37:54
Hmm.

Zak 37:58
See how that goes.

Interviewer 37:59
I like that. So there's almost, because you were speaking earlier just about protests and like the activism side of things, and then you finished speaking more about a kind of subtle way of creating messaging.
Is there, how would you link Substack to both of these domains and what's more important do

you think?
If that question makes sense.

Zak 38:27
So, and by more important, are you referring to sub-stack versus...

Interviewer 38:32
No, so like sort of activism and protest, like more upfront activism or more quiet activism that's more subtle. And what substacks linked to both of those for you?

Zak 38:46
Well, the Substack link for me personally was originally to...
Get my message up with just a medium.
Obviously, it was an easy place and still is, I feel, easy on-ramp for just even the average person who wants to get on how to use.
The wizzy, you know, the way it's set up with the...
It's just very easy, very, very well-designed.

Interviewer 39:17
Mm.

Zak 39:17
Doing that.
And that's something I, you know, I have expertise in analysing those kinds of systems.
What I did.
Last 20 years.
For me in the printing business, we had to know every.
Every kind of.
Not just one, I mean, you had PageMaker Edwards since late 8 or since the 90s, basically a Photoshop, all high-end software.
All their competitors, so you know, after dealing with them for 20 years and also being a person who looks at things politically, I'm able to.
You?
And the weather is a gateway drug into systems thinking.
So...
Pattern recognition to see patterns overtime, and...
see how you're sort of manipulated into buying all kinds of different products. And we did. We had to maintain every single known graphic design programme under the sun. We had to know them all because we would get files from clients. And that was your job as a prepress person is to take those files and fix them so that they're actually ready to

Right.
And just do, you know, working every day on these programs, you start to see things.
And also, like I said, I was a web designer or web web designer.
Watching, um, as a uh.
The title they gave me, e-commerce specialist. My boss gave me. What we did was the owner, give me a brief, try to be brief on this one, description of software.
I, the last place I worked for was actually a franchise, a franchise like Pico's.
But...
The owner was, you know, NBA, Harvard NBA, New York Money, and...

Interviewer 41:30
Mm.

Zak 41:34
He came in and started, he wanted to get into some business of his own, money, and so he bought a small one of the little satellite stores, just a tiny little store, and went around and bought up all the rest of those stores. They were owned by different people.
The conglomerated it, and then got a big space, and we still had all these little satellites.
Bought work. Basically, he's acquiring people's. Customer lists when he would buy the other little print shops and go in all of these things.
But he.
Had the money to afford this really high-end software, so we had this.
Software that basically, it was a couple $100,000 just for the software, and then the hardware was another couple $100,000. You could, it linked with all the Adobe products. We had plugins, so you could make variable products. You could send me a list of your client list and a letter.

Interviewer 42:29
Mm.

Zak 42:37
And, and you, we could tag anywhere within it to make it look personalized.
But it also had Photoshop plugin.
In all of our work, we eventually became a fully off.
Adobe.
OK, on that sense.

Interviewer 42:55
Yeah.

Zak 42:57

Got known for that sort of thing, but it also had.
Modules that you could actually easily create a website for customers, so they could go online and order their business cards or their letterheads, standard stuff, and we could also make them.
So that's actually what I wound up doing.
So it was about 30 different companies, a lot of real estate companies. I did Zennaro.
Amazon.
Most of their printing Whole Foods, so I was with the merger between Amazon and Whole Foods right in the middle of that.
The, you know, you get to see the machinations.
Um...
capitalism, essentially, right? And you get to know how, and I also had to work with several people at those companies to get them to what they need. So there was a lot of, that's where a lot of this instructive writing.

Interviewer 43:44
Yeah.

Zak 43:59
came into play. Also speaking to them on the phone, walking them through. So I would take the file that we printed and I would have to repurpose them for...
Behold.
Integrate the...
personalization. For instance, one company may have three or four different types of business cards. I would systematise it. That was one of the first jobs they gave me.

Interviewer 44:33
Mm.

Zak 44:34
Started working at the big.
At the big store.
Was to gave the new guy the crap job, which was to take.
Like this one company with a real estate.
Brokerage for not a...
Home loans, they did home loans and brokers for home loans.
They had 10 different types of business cards. Everyone hated working on them, so of course they gave it to me.
I already worked at the company in the satellite for two years. My boss knew I had my capabilities, and so I systematised it all, we put it all online.
So made it much easier so they can then go online and order their own card. But sometimes the

name goes on this side, sometimes the name goes on that side. Anyway, so.
You learn not just about all that nonsense, which is part of the capitalism, but also about how these companies work.

Interviewer 45:36
Yeah.
Yeah, it's very ingrained in our system.

Zak 45:40
Yeah.

Interviewer 45:42
And so the interview is coming to an end now, but I wondered if there was anything that we haven't discussed related to how people engage with information online that you want to share.

Zak 45:56
Well, I have seen it degrade.
And I've been, I've been a subscriber now for about four years, I think. I think it was 20.
Yeah, I think it was about 2022 when I first started poking around in it and then...
I really became more active when Sarah came here, but she had decided she, I was following her in another place.
You should have a podcast.
Gaslip Nation.
And then, and I had a breakup for her.
Close.
And, uh...
Took a vacation and she got on Substack and she's been writing essays.
Year now.
The.
I see a lot of...
Strange things with a lot of fandom.
You know, comments in the comments, Balbo.
I was trained as a weather observer, but sort of in a very scientific approach to...
Observe things, so I am an observer, and in my 40s I got into trying to figure out why I became who I am.
And a lot of psychology, and...
understand how the human development works.
And...
Most people aren't aware of any of that stuff. I see a lot of that.
The frustration, see, I kind of, it's also part of why I'm on Student.

Interviewer 47:41
Mhm.

Zak 47:43
Try to figure out why people are, you know, where people ran in general.

Interviewer 47:47
Yeah.
Yeah.

Zak 47:48
for me and my own hands to communicate.

Interviewer 47:53
Yeah.

Zak 47:54
And it's kind of good ties in with the activism, shouldn't you ask me earlier? I don't after all the years, I mean.
It doesn't really work. I think more. It does. I don't want to say it doesn't.
I think, ultimately, for the end goal that they're trying to.
doesn't work. And even really bringing people together, I think it actually works more in the opposite direction. I think it, you know, recently I've seen people who are in that field or studying it.

Interviewer 48:19
You don't think it's at all?

Zak 48:35
Have latched on to, well, it still brings people together.
But I think there's an opposite equal effect.
All the thermodynamics, please.
A different loss. For every action, there's an opposite, equal and opposite reaction. I think it actually pushes people away too because nothing happened.

Interviewer 48:47
Interesting.
Okay, yeah.

Zak 48:56
Nothing, right?

Interviewer 48:58
Do you think subset protects?

Zak 48:59
So...

Interviewer 49:02
people from that result.

Zak 49:05
I wouldn't say protect.
Not at all.
I don't want to be pessimistic. I'm actually really an optimistic person. That's why I keep doing it. But I'm a realist and I've seen over time.

Interviewer 49:19
Yeah.

Zak 49:27
When I first got on, they were in a transition. Eleanor Musk had just bought X.
The Twitter and...
There was a lot of people leaving Twitter.
The big name people, so they were, I think, Substack was trying to...
Capture that those people, so they started the notes was a new thing based off of.
and to capture that Twitter vibe, being able to put a short little note.
Um...
Right.
And now I understand that Andrew Tate's on. People have been complaining about that recently. Excuse me.
The.
No, I think that...
And it's hard to tell, because I know that the leaderboard part where you get the this random stuff that's supposed to be people that you follow with the algorithm pushes to you.
Is.
keeps you. Like for me, I feel it's been keeping me. I don't really get any artists.
I think I have one or two people that I follow. I do kind of, you know, if they're on one of the

other shows like recently.
What's her name? Just got a new book out. She's A New York-based artist.
And she was on Zotayo.
Did a live interview.
You talking about?

Interviewer 51:10
No.

Zak 51:10
No.
Are you familiar with the tale of his songs?

Interviewer 51:14
No, Zotaya, no.

Zak 51:19
That's probably one of the biggest sites on, I would imagine. Mehdi Hassan, who Mehdi Hassan is.

Interviewer 51:28
Say that again?

Zak 51:29
Betty Hassan.

Interviewer 51:31
Betty Hassan.

Zak 51:33
Medi, MEDMEDHI.

Interviewer 51:36
MEDHI no.

Zak 51:39
Yeah, he's a...

Interviewer 51:40
Who is it?

Zak 51:42
He's a.
reporter, who's, you know, newsperson, he was on, sorry, he's British.

Interviewer 51:46
Okay.

Zak 51:53
The big, he was on British TV, the main person, main.
Order and came in the States and got on, I think it was on MSN.

Interviewer 51:58
And it was.

Zak 52:04
That is on.

Interviewer 52:06
Okay. Yeah, I recognise this face. Yeah.

Zak 52:07
TETEO yeah.
So he started, he got fired, basically. He's one of the first big people that got fired and started his own company.
It's grown. It's primarily at first focusing on Palestine, the issue of Palestine, and then it branched off.
It still is, pretty much, that's the focus, Middle East.

Interviewer 52:32
Mhm.

Zak 52:34
But they also have, uh, he has Mandela on.
And then...
Yeah.

Interviewer 52:45
Yeah, great. Well, Zak, thank you so much for your insights.

Appendix B.7: Interview with Crystal
27 April 2026, 11:06am
36m 21s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

Interviewer 0:04
Okay, so I'll just get your consent verbally that you're okay for me to record the audio and it will be used for the purposes of the research.

Crystal 0:14
Yes, I consent.

Interviewer 0:16
Thank you. So yeah, we'll just have a, it's quite a casual conversation. It's not going to be too structured. We can go off my questions, like depending on the insights that you have. And if there's anything that doesn't make sense, please just say, I don't know, I don't have an answer to that or that doesn't make sense to me.

Crystal 0:28
Mhm.

Interviewer 0:34
So yeah, it will be pretty chill. Yeah.

Crystal 0:35
Mhm.
All sounds good.

Interviewer 0:38
So the first question is just, can you tell me a bit more about how often you use Substack when you downloaded it and where else do you get your information online?
Related to long forms that.

Crystal 0:51
So...
I downloaded it in the beginning of my masters and started using it frequently then, which was about, I would say, like 7 or 8 months ago now. I kind of downloaded it just to...
keep myself informed, but in a long form content kind of way, because I guess being a Gen Zer,

like I'm constantly on TikTok and Instagram and like immersing myself in just solely short form content. And I kind of realised that it wasn't

Interviewer 1:28
Yeah.

Crystal 1:32
doing anything for me intellectually. So I moved on to Substack and just kind of like casually would scroll on there and try to scroll on there more often than I would on other social media platforms.

Interviewer 1:49
Mm.

Crystal 1:49
I would say it is the only long form content that I use other than when I'm like reading journals for papers and things, but...

Interviewer 1:59
Yeah.

Crystal 2:00
Um, yeah, I am really...
enjoying it. I think the only thing is I kind when I read things I kind of
take it quite literally in the beginning and I'm trying to be more careful and think critically about what people are saying online because it is not fact and I shouldn't take it as fact, which is something that I initially tend to, used to tend to do.

Interviewer 2:21
Mmh.

Crystal 2:34
But, yeah.

Interviewer 2:36
Okay, yeah, so speaking about that like critical part, how did you notice that you were just like taking everything literally and like what made you decide that maybe that wasn't the best approach?

Crystal 2:40

Mhm.
So I would read, I don't know how the algorithm is on Substack, but I would read things where the title was something I was interested. For example, I don't know, there was one thing I remember, it was like Sabrina Carpenter and like along the lines of
her persona and feminism and

Interviewer 3:10
Mm.

Crystal 3:12
I kind of like, I was reading through it and I already have my own opinions about that certain topic. And I was reading through and I was like, oh, okay, this makes sense. I can see where this person is coming from and what they're trying to say and things like that. But then after reflecting on it, I kind of thought, well, I don't agree, you know, like,
This doesn't align with my own morals and my own thoughts about this topic, but...
I was, whilst I was reading it, I was almost being convinced, if that makes sense, that that was the correct thing or the right thing. And I think what's really useful is that subset allows you to comment and everyone to comment. And I really enjoy reading everyone else's opinions on the same topic and seeing people also be critical about what this is saying. And the comment section on Substack feels way kinder with more nuanced, in depth answers than for example, on Instagram. So yeah, I think
In the moment when I'm reading it.
It can become quite like...
hard for me to think critically about it, but I think it's important for me to reflect after so that I'm not spreading misinformation when I go to talk to my friends about it later on, for example.

Interviewer 4:28
Mm-hmm.
Yeah, that's interesting that it's like in the moment you're just absorbing the information and then you're like, okay, actually, and I wonder if maybe there's something to do with the fact that you're given more length. So maybe on Instagram, you're only looking at something for two seconds, but perhaps the time that it takes to read a subset article gives you that opportunity.

Crystal 4:43
Mhm.
Mhm.
Yeah, and I think like.
the way that time is perceived as like this most valuable thing and like how people don't want to waste time. And I feel like because I'm taking time out of my day, like I'm doing a master's and I have a full time job and taking time out of my day, I don't want to waste it on reading something

that I don't think is going to
I guess, help me or be have a positive impact on me or my thoughts or whatever. So
It's almost like I'm forcing myself to enjoy what I'm reading because I don't want it to be a waste of time, but I'm kind of slowly trying to get rid of that mindset that time is, yeah, it is this really precious thing, but it's also valuable for me to waste time and
reflect back on things and realise that that wasn't for me, you know, because it's just as beneficial as reading something that I completely align myself with, I would say.

Interviewer 5:55
Mhm.
Yeah, so this is then going to be like 2 questions in one. Are you happy with what Substack can offer you then in comparison to other things that like where you get your information and how often will you read these articles if you have time?

Crystal 6:12
Mm.
I'm definitely happy with what Substack is offering me right now. It's something very different to what I have been using previously, I think.
I used it.
I guess.
Because I'm working and I've got school at the moment, I haven't been using it as much as I'd like to. And I kind of turn to short form content because it's quick and easy and something I can just come off of straight away. And when I read like a long article, I really do want to sit

Interviewer 6:51
Mm.
It's easier.

Crystal 7:08
down, read it and kind of reflect on it and like take at least 10 minutes of my day to do that. And even though 10 minutes doesn't seem like that long, before I open up an app, it does. So I would say that I'm using it a lot less frequently than I like to.

Interviewer 7:27
Okay, yeah, makes sense. I'm saying. And this is more of just the perception question, but how would you describe Substack's offering to someone who hasn't used it? Like, how would you label it?

Crystal 7:27
Yeah.

Mhm.
I know a lot of people use it for different things, but I did recommend it to one of my friends from school once and I basically said like, this is something that has helped me see other people's opinions and theories and
Uh.

Interviewer 8:04
Mmh.

Crystal 8:07
I guess like perceptions of topics that we were already talking about in conversation. So...
I think it was just a way for me to like, I guess, back up my own points by saying like, this person thought the same thing as me on Substack, that kind of thing.

Interviewer 8:27
Mhm.
So kind of a focus on the fact that it was like written just by other people that like are around like in the ether, like just normal people.

Crystal 8:36
Yeah, I think that was what drew me towards it is that they, a lot of these people are pretty regular, are half of the time doing the exact same thing as I am, and are really good at writing something compelling and something that I can understand. Because I think, for example, with journals, they use a lot of jargon and like words that

Interviewer 8:56
Mhm.

Crystal 9:00
I would have to like come off the article to double cheque what that meant and things. And the layout of it is just not as readable. But I think Substack is very readable and easy to digest. And it also makes it easier for me to critically think about it afterwards and reflect.
Which I like, yeah.

Interviewer 9:22
That's interesting. So that's one of my questions as well is, can you tell me about an experience or more generally when you found something difficult to read on Substack? So let's say you haven't quite understood like certain terminology or what they were saying and how would you deal
with that.

Crystal 9:41
Um...
I think, to be honest, with Substack, I've only really read stuff that...

Interviewer 9:50
Makes sense.

Crystal 9:50
I can grasp and make sense to me. I don't, I think if I was to come across an interesting article that was...
written in a way that I didn't understand, I would kind of the same way I do with journals is just search up what it meant, kind of read the comments actually.
Um...
Things like that to help me understand, but usually I don't.
go too far out of what I can understand.

Interviewer 10:23
Yeah, that makes sense. And kind of related to like the comment section and like engagement on Substack. Can you tell me a bit more about?

Crystal 10:31
Mhm.

Interviewer 10:34
how you engage with others. Do you comment a lot? Do you message people? Have you built any relationships through Substack?

Crystal 10:42
Um, not so far.
I have, I've kind of been like a bit incognito, like I just read through, maybe like a few things. I do share it, share some interesting.

Interviewer 10:54
Mhm.

Crystal 10:58
Substack articles with my friends and I guess we can talk about it as well, but most of the time I see them in person and show it to them and say, oh my gosh, did you read this? Yeah.

Interviewer 11:01
Yeah.
Okay, yeah.
Yeah. And I'm actually just going to jump back a little bit because I missed one of my questions. But when you're reading the articles, can you describe it a bit more about like what your process is when you're engaging in it? Like

Crystal 11:15
Mhm.
No worries.

Interviewer 11:28
You kind of have already touched upon this, but do you question the articles? Do you read outside Substack based on something that you've read, like, or do you just kind of skim through it?

Crystal 11:42
I think what I appreciate is how some articles you like actually have a reference list at the end. And it's quite important to me that, because like I said, I read things almost as fact in the moment.

Interviewer 11:50
And.

Crystal 12:00
And it's important for me when I'm reflecting to double check, is this true or are this is this person just saying it? And I think I kind of.
give the author more credibility when I scroll down straight away and see that there's a reference list, because I know that some stuff that authors don't include one. Especially if it's, yeah, it does for sure, especially if it's like a controversial topic or something that I've been wanting to

Interviewer 12:21
Mm.
So that helps you to trust them.

Crystal 12:36
read up upon. Yeah, definitely I look for a reference list. I don't think...

Interviewer 12:41
Mhm.

Crystal 12:45
From what I remember, I don't really read ones without a reference list or without some sort of like...

Interviewer 12:53
Evidence.

Crystal 12:54
No, yeah, of like credibility or something, yeah.

Interviewer 12:57
That's interesting. And do you ever come across perspectives on Substack that are new to you, like that you disagree with or kind of that seem like that outside of the algorithm or is everything quite like related to your interests?

Crystal 13:14
I have seen a few things that are...
quite out of this world for me because I'm quite, I'm surrounded by people who have the same beliefs as me and...
have, I guess, the same morals and thoughts and I forget that the world is so big and that all these people have really, really different opinions and sometimes it's like...
I don't know, it just feels so...
I don't want to say, uh, it just feels...
out of this world for me. I like I almost thought that they didn't exist, these people who have these kind of thoughts, but it's interesting for me to read them.

Interviewer 13:53
And.
You have an example?

Crystal 14:02
So I read something about Miss Andry recently and it was like, it was actually the comments of these men saying like, you are
like sending death threats to the author and saying like really, really awful things. And it was just like, oh, you kind of are.
You're basically proving her right by saying all these things, but...

Interviewer 14:32
Mm.

Crystal 14:34
Surely you know that because you've just read this article before commenting on it. You know, like I think I forget that people don't have critical thinking skills or don't.
they like to voice their opinion before educating themselves on things and I think...
I don't know, that just...
is so different for me because what I'm used to is first you read upon it and then you form your own opinion after, you know, so yeah, it's quite...

Interviewer 15:04
Yeah, and it's interesting that these people are like reading, taking a lot of time to read an article just to bash it. Like, that's crazy.

Crystal 15:12
Yeah, honestly, and like...
I understand, like, everyone is allowed to have their own opinion and, like, feel a certain way about anything, especially when sometime is a public platform, but...
to go to the extent of being mean to someone and sending death threats and things like that. And it didn't even make any sense, like what their points were. It was just like, surely not. Surely this is a joke, you know, like surely you're doing this.

Interviewer 15:38
Yeah.

Crystal 15:48
out of for fun or as a joke. Like, I don't, it's hard for me to grasp that this is truly what this person feels, you know.

Interviewer 15:55
Yeah, yeah, I get that. And then circling back again to what you were saying before about sharing things with your friends and also in person and being like, oh, I read this. Can you tell me a bit more about that experience when you see something on Substack and you've used it?

Crystal 16:05
Mm.

Interviewer 16:13
In the real world.

Crystal 16:16
So like an example of one, I would say.
So I went to a...
a conference with a friend, like it was UK aid conference and they were basically talking about how they are going to use their budget on that has actually been cut and how they're going to use it.
for international aid, right? And they would, they basically had a few panellists come in who were from the, I think it was Nigeria and

Interviewer 16:47
Mm.

Crystal 17:00
one other country, I forgot now, it was a while ago, but they, they were, the panellists were basically giving their insights on what they can use the budget for and what the issues are with how the UK aid team is basically contributing.
to what they have themselves have actually signed up for. And then, so we kind of left that conference like inspired really, and we were talking about it and things like that. And then I was like to my friend, did you read this article?

Interviewer 17:19
Mm.

Crystal 17:38
About...
I forgot what it was.
It was something, it was something super related to the conference. Yeah, and it was also, we had another panellist in the same conference who spoke about UK citizens' perception on what the UK is doing with international aid.

Interviewer 17:46
Yeah, same to the bank.
Mhm.

Crystal 18:02
And a lot of it was like people were saying, no, like I don't want the UK to give any aid to

countries outside of the UK, blah, blah, blah, blah, like things like that. And I had read something similar on Substack and I was like, oh my gosh, this is crazy. I read this a few days ago.
and I showed it to my friend and I think it was really useful to...
for the sake of the conversation and for the sake of like feeling.
inspired in that way that someone else was talking about it recently. Yeah, so...

Interviewer 18:40
So, yeah.
Yeah, and it kind of grounds like the reality with like the space online and there's like a lot of connexions with what's happening on like a grassroots level. Yeah.

Crystal 18:52
Yeah, for sure, for sure. And I think it was, it was quite like nice to see that people who don't have the opportunity like we did to go to a UKAID conference still share the same opinions. And like, obviously I don't know what the person who wrote it

Interviewer 19:08
Mm.

Crystal 19:12
was doing or anything but like to see them post it like publicly on like a social platform like that rather than as a journal or something or on the government website. It was nice to see that shared, yeah.

Interviewer 19:24
It's more accessible.
Yeah, that's interesting. And do your friends also use Substack or do you just tend to show them things?

Crystal 19:35
So.

Interviewer 19:35
And they, like, look at the link.

Crystal 19:38
I think of, like I have one friend who I showed it to and then she downloaded it after that and I'm not sure if she's using it often. But yeah, mainly when I'm with people I show them on my phone like, did you see this? Yeah.

Interviewer 19:43
No, Gaia.
M.
Yeah.
And even like discussing topics that you might read online, like at dinner or something, like, does that ever happen?

Crystal 20:03
Yeah, I think before I was.
On Cyberstack, I was watching like video essays and like they were, I know TikTok has some, but there's this YouTuber on called Mina Lee and she would do video essays on like, not necessarily like silly subjects, but they would be like quite random and interesting and it would be like,

Interviewer 20:13
Room.

Crystal 20:29
Oh, I don't know.
The fall of...
some fashion like and she would like include like the political opinions on it and all of that and it was like super interesting and I think

Interviewer 20:37
Yeah.

Crystal 20:47
I was sharing that with my friends 1st and telling them before I even knew what Substack was, I was like, oh, did you watch this? And I can understand that video essays are a bit easier for people to digest because we're used to TikTok and stuff now. So yeah, I was sharing that first.

Interviewer 21:02
Mm.

Crystal 21:07
And then now I'm...

Interviewer 21:08
And then you can more about on sub stack.

Crystal 21:10
Yeah, let's say so.

Interviewer 21:11
Okay, interesting. So the next...
Oh no. Yeah, last bit in this section is do you find it easy or difficult to build informed opinions when using Substack? And what factors might influence this? For example, it could be your own habits or it could be something to do with the app.

Crystal 21:36
Um, what did you say it was informed?

Interviewer 21:40
Building informed opinions, so like...

Crystal 21:42
Okay.

Interviewer 21:43
Kind of, you kind of touched upon it earlier as well, but like actually being like, okay, this is something that I can now feel genuinely.

Crystal 21:51
I think the way that I go about on Substack is I have an opinion that I feel strongly about already and I kind of look for articles that

Interviewer 22:00
Mhm.

Crystal 22:06
touch on that subject whether they agree or disagree. I think if I...
If someone who, I guess, wasn't studying the same thing as me or as interested in the same topics as me and they went on Substack, I think what they would see would look very different to what my kind of algorithm looks like.

Interviewer 22:26
Yeah.

Crystal 22:30

So like it does, it more so like reiterates how I already feel a lot of the time. And I wouldn't say I use it to help me form opinions because I wouldn't, depending on like what kind of article it is, I wouldn't really use it to like

Interviewer 22:37
Yeah.

Crystal 22:50
Research or...
Kind of.
teach myself a topic that's completely new. I think a lot of the time what helps me understand is my background in like school and stuff because if I was to show it to a friend who, for example, does like a medical degree right now, I think
I would have to.
kind of explain it a bit more for her to understand. Like I was reading and sorry, for an example, I was reading an article about like capitalism in the US and Japan and how it's like, how you can see late stage capitalism in Japan.

Interviewer 23:23
Mm.

Crystal 23:39
and how supposedly the US is on the way to that, right? And I have like a lot of my friends are...

Interviewer 23:39
Yeah.

Crystal 23:47
quite obsessed with Japan and rightfully so I understand like they like anime and things like that. And like, yeah, it's a trend, right? But also the, you can see like...

Interviewer 23:53
The trend.

Crystal 24:01
If I was to show it, show that article to them, I think it would be hard for them to grasp because they already have an opinion about how much they like Japan and how amazing it is. And I think what the article was saying about like convenience culture and like the sexualization online and things like that,

Interviewer 24:10
Yeah.

Crystal 24:21
wouldn't necessarily like, they wouldn't be in denial or whatever, but I think I would have to over explain what this means because I did an undergrad, I did economics, so I kind of understand like,

Interviewer 24:33
Room.

Crystal 24:38
the trends in capitalism and things like that and I understand.
I guessed a lot of the jargon, more than what they would, so...

Interviewer 24:50
Mm.

Crystal 24:52
I wouldn't.
Kind of, I wouldn't share something with a friend who doesn't understand the same as me, and...

Interviewer 25:01
Yeah, I get that. It's like you're kind of it's more building upon like already existing foundations rather than like completely new information.

Crystal 25:11
Yeah, for sure. And I think that's what Substack is helpful for. Like, I don't think I would ever read an article on Substack about human health or like the human body or something like that, because that's something I don't know pretty much anything about past GCSE.

Interviewer 25:13
Yeah.
Yeah.

Crystal 25:30
Science, if I'm honest, you know.

Interviewer 25:32
Yeah, and I guess it's not as interesting to you maybe.

Crystal 25:35
Yeah, for sure. Yeah.

Interviewer 25:35
I think, yeah. So then this is the final section and this is a bit more about attention and like the fact that you're reading longer form stuff. But can you remember the last few articles you read and were you able to finish them in one sitting? But can you talk a bit more about like your focus on that?

Crystal 25:46
Mhm.
Um...
I don't, I think I kind of...
Because it's a lot to scroll through and find something. I would say like I do skim a lot of articles that...

Interviewer 26:16
Yeah.

Crystal 26:20
I kind of, I think there were a few like green flags and red flags like either subliminally or whatever that I look for in an article and I will skim it to see if it's.
something I want to read and something that I'm interested in because I guess like sometimes a title can be really misleading and sometimes I see on stuff like that people are just...

Interviewer 26:41
Mm-hmm.

Crystal 26:47
very casually writing, like almost like a text message or like a long text message and like there's no like grammar or whatever. And not to say that that's a bad thing, but I think I choose to read something to also just help me with my own grammar and my own

Interviewer 27:04
Yeah.

Crystal 27:07
vocabulary as well so.

Interviewer 27:09
That's interesting. So the style of the writing can affect your attention a bit.

Crystal 27:15
For sure, yeah. So I don't, I think I remember what articles stick out to me, like the Japan one. I read something about reproductive justice, which I enjoyed. And I do like them to just save them on my
count to read later on if I have a moment. If I ever get to it, I feel like sometimes I do that and then I scroll on the timeline looking for something new and I have like a backlog of things that I've already told myself I want to read. But

Interviewer 27:48
Okay.
Yeah.

Crystal 27:52
Yeah, I would say like.
Sometimes I like put in my notes like this is something I enjoyed, something I want to research more if I really enjoy an article. But I wouldn't say I could tell you what I read, like the last few articles that I've read, yeah. Also, seeing something that's...
designed really to get my attention, but doesn't go very far in terms of exploring the ins and outs of something, both sides of the argument, and doesn't really, if I'm honest, make me think very much because it tends to be one-sided, it tends to be aimed at exciting my brain.

Interviewer 28:02
Okay then.
Just that.
Yeah.
Makes sense, and.
Yeah, can you remember a specific article? So you kind of mentioned the ones that you really enjoyed and or that you can remember at least. What effect does it have on you to like have so much focus and attention on an article? Like, is this meaningful to you?

Crystal 28:27
Mhm.
Um...

I think...
Yeah, it is very meaningful to me to kind of...
immerse myself in the same opinions that I have, but it's also, I think it's good for my brain and I want to keep doing it, it's thinking critically. Even if I do completely agree with an article, I also want to
Kind of like...
Analyse what?
could be, I guess, wrong or not necessarily wrong about something or something that I might not completely align with.

Interviewer 29:21
Mhm.

Crystal 29:24
I don't know, I think...
it helps to train my brain more to think critically. I think with my masters now, we're pushed to just be super critical in everything, even if we read the research and everything completely aligns.
they still say, but where is your critical analysis in this? You need to critically analyse this and I think...
Doing that in like everyday kind of content is good to is good practise for me for what I need to do in like the big stuff I guess.

Interviewer 30:01
Yeah.
And do you think that that value has importance beyond you, like, and for society in general? Like, so being able to pay attention and think critically to longer content, like, do you think it has a bigger value?

Crystal 30:22
I think the world could definitely be a much better place if people were immersing themselves in content like this and thinking critically about it. Because from what I've actually seen online is that people take videos and content and like photos or whatever.
As fact, which is is what is which is what I believe is really, really harmful, and I think...

Interviewer 30:45
Mhm.

Crystal 30:52

being able to kind of like see other perspectives and kind of come up with your own opinion without input of anyone else's is like a really important skill that I think everyone should have.

Interviewer 31:07
Yeah.

Crystal 31:09
Yeah.

Interviewer 31:10
And then my final question is, do you ever feel any responsibility when it comes to what you're reading online and what you share with your friends or others?

Crystal 31:21
Um.
In terms of responsibility, like I wouldn't share something that I think would be harmful for someone or like, I think, for example, I have like younger brothers and if I'm reading an article on Miss Andry, they're not really going to understand what that means. And

Interviewer 31:37
Mm.

Crystal 31:44
how it's not like, I wouldn't show it to them as a dig to them, for example. Like, this is...

Interviewer 31:51
Mm.

Crystal 31:55
What's wrong with you guys, you know? So I do...
I would say like it is important to share things with precaution and like think about who you're sending it to. Is this relevant to them? How are they going to take this? But most of the time I really only share it when I think someone has the same kind of opinions or could

Interviewer 32:05
Mm.

Crystal 32:21
Give me a...
another perspective on it, I would say.

Interviewer 32:28
Yeah, and even then when you're just reading, do you feel like a sense of responsibility for like the articles that you might choose to read?

Crystal 32:29
Yeah.
Um.
When you say responsibility, is that like, how do you mean?

Interviewer 32:41
Like...
Do you think that the decisions that you make on Substack have consequences beyond just making that decision?

Crystal 32:53
I would say, yeah, I think.
Like I was saying in the beginning, like before I would take things as fact and it's...
It's up to me to choose not to, I guess. And if I, if someone else was reading on Substack, like they are responsible for what they're reading and whether or not they're going to analyse it and think critically about it.

Interviewer 33:12
Okay.

Crystal 33:28
it could be a good thing and a bad thing for that person. And
say they did take it as fact or if I took something on Substaff as fact, like more than likely I'm going to tell my friends something from there as fact and it could be complete misinformation. So yeah, I do think there is some sort of responsibility for sure.

Interviewer 33:50
Yeah, thanks, please.
Awesome. So then lastly, I guess, is there anything that we haven't discussed that you think is important in relation to like how we read things online and share information? Is there anything that you'd want to mention?

Crystal 34:09
Um...
Don't think so. I think that's all good, yeah.

Interviewer 34:12

Okay, cool. That's okay. There's no priority. Awesome. So that's everything. I hope you enjoyed it. I hope you felt that you could get something out of as well.

Appendix B.8: Interview with Ramiro
28 April 2026, 07:03am
82m 41s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

Interviewer 0:04
Okay, so the recording has started and I just want to get your oral consent that you're okay for me to use the recording just for the purposes of the research only.

Ramiro 0:16
Yeah, I consent to you using the recording on this session for your research purposes.

Interviewer 0:28
Thank you. So now we'll just have a discussion. It's not going to be too formal. So if I'll ask you some questions, but of course, if you want to go slightly off, if you have some insights that you think are relevant, that's absolutely fine. And if there's anything that doesn't make sense to you,

Ramiro 0:28
So, that's it.

Interviewer 0:46
just let me know. Or if you don't have an answer, that's also fine. You can just say, I don't have an answer.

Ramiro 0:55
All right.

Interviewer 0:55
So the first question, we'll just start quite simple, but I wondered if you could tell me a bit about why you chose to download Substack and how often you use it.

Ramiro 0:56
All right.
Okay.
Okay, thank you very much.
Well...
Like, if I look back, I'm trying to try to put it that way, so stuck in in the...
I came upon an article that I needed to follow the link attached to read the full article. So that must have been how I came upon Substar. Because sometimes you come across some

applications from advertisements,
Maybe, for example, I'm a regular user of Facebook too. So maybe you're on Facebook and there's a new app and there are advertisements on Facebook and you come across it, you look at its features and you're like, okay, let's try it. But I feel like for Substack, I came upon an article

Interviewer 1:58
Mhm.

Ramiro 2:10
followed the article, probably read the article on the web version. And apparently I must have been urged or notched to download the application, which I did. And since then, I believe I'm a regular user of Substack. I've been a regular user of Substack.
Although I am not particularly, and also on the on the have, I like, like what that means is I consume, I don't do much of putting out. I don't think I've been posting on some stack, maybe restack possibly, but

Interviewer 2:43
Thank you.

Ramiro 2:51
I am authoring or like posting my own works. I haven't been doing that, so I hope that answers the question.

Interviewer 3:00
Yes, perfect. And would you say that you like what Substack offers you in terms of how you consume content in comparison to things like Facebook?

Ramiro 3:12
Definitely, like how do I describe this? You know, I love the fact that soft stack has a purpose and soft stack is kind of sticking to that purpose and also padding
It shows that aligns to that purpose.

Interviewer 3:36
What would you say that purpose is?

Ramiro 3:36
You know, when?
Okay, like if I have to define that myself, like to come up with it myself, I'll be like Substack is for people who believe they have things to share and
They don't necessarily want to go through the traditional media to put these things out. And they

also believe that they can get, they all believe that they will find their own audience out there. Like people, yeah, people have diverse ideas.

Interviewer 4:16
Mm.

Ramiro 4:20
People think about different things, and it is interesting that.
No matter how obscure or how popular, or let's say obscure, for example, the idea is when you put the idea out, you would have need to find somebody who has been thinking about it or feel had or seen as if you are specifically talking
Thinking about them in the post, so, and...
Yeah, I feel like Softstack is able to achieve that purpose because, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Interviewer 4:54
Mm.
Yeah, that's really interesting. Thank you. And
For you more personally, what do you think the role that Substack plays in your life? Like, what can it offer you?

Ramiro 5:10
Okay, Softstack is my go-to newsletter, weekly newsletter application. Yeah, so I am subscribed to quite a lot of authors.

Interviewer 5:17
Okay, yeah.

Ramiro 5:26
I read their weekly newsletters on Substack. I love that idea A lot. I love the fact that Substack offers some wonderful features. So for example, there's a new newsletter.
I can either read it, I can listen to it, and...
I can do a lot of things with this. And yeah, and I also love the fact that it offers live chat. I love the fact that quite a lot of popular authors, both here in my home country and outside in the West, in the West specifically,

Interviewer 5:59
It is.

Ramiro 6:10
in the West. I love the fact that they have chosen or they have chosen to or they choose to use

Substack over some other applications. Like they are quite frequent. A very good example is Elif Shafak.
I don't think I've ever missed her newsletter.

Interviewer 6:32
No.
Yeah, and can you tell me a bit more about the types of authors that you're reading on Substack? Like, do you know whereabouts they're from and what kind of things they're writing about?

Ramiro 6:47
Okay, for example, if we can categorize organizations to as part of all sorts, you know, you know, there are some, I mean, did you get that? Okay, so I am interested in.

Interviewer 6:57
Yes, yeah, that's fine.

Ramiro 7:05
Literature, I'm interested in motivational write-ups, and I'm interested in mental health, so...

Interviewer 7:15
Mhm.

Ramiro 7:16
And yes, I so far I believe I'm able to keep up with that on soft target. For example, Elif Shafak is my go-to person for musings around literature, around things happening in the world, around little things that people don't really pay so much attention to. I mean, she's wonderful with regards to that. She can write a whole lot. Then for my newsletter, there is an organization in my own country known as C for Mental Health.
So, I, I guess.

Interviewer 7:57
P for mental health.

Ramiro 7:59
B. for many times.
So I get to read.
Yeah, weekly newsletter as well, and I think I feel...

Interviewer 8:13

So would you say you then get a mixture of stuff from different parts of the world, from your home country and elsewhere?

Ramiro 8:24
Sorry, can you call me again?

Interviewer 8:26
Yes, I was just asking if you could explain a bit more about the diversity. So would you say that you get lots of information from different regions of the world?

Ramiro 8:37
Indeed, that does, that's true in the sense that on soft stack.
I mean, there are people from across the globe, like, like, like Substack does not limit me to the people in my country only. And I get to read from diverse people from different races, people from different climes.
people from different countries. So I love that about Substack. And as a matter of fact, I should be making more impactful use of Stubstack. But you know that there's also subscription to Substack. For example,

Interviewer 9:25
Mm.

Ramiro 9:26
I want to benefit more from this particular author. The, I think, is this Sanders? Sanders, but I'm trying to remember his first name. I don't think it is Benny Sanders. I think Benny Sanders is a politician in America. So this person I'm talking about,

Interviewer 9:42
Yeah.
What?
Mhm.

Ramiro 10:07
In as much as I'm considering it, I'm not there yet. So why am I saying this? I'm saying this because, yes, the answer is true. It says that I get the opportunity to read from different, like various people, not just people from my country.
I mean, people, people even at different stages of their career. For example, you read from somebody who is just trying to believe in themselves, like just starting out as a writer or just starting out as a motivational speaker. And, you know, they continue to muse about that particular stage of their career.

how they are trying so much not to relent, to keep believing in themselves that they are going to get there. And yet, you also have people like Elif Shafak, who is already at, if I can say, peak of a career, current president of Royal Society of Literature.
I mean, I feel like that's diverse enough for me. Thank you.

Interviewer 11:14
Yeah, yeah, I think it's interesting you actually mentioned that because it has such a wide range of speakers, but of course the subscription thing can limit people's access and it's definitely worth thinking about.
So my next question requires a little bit of memory. If you can remember the last article or the last few articles that you read, and can you talk to me a bit more about how you engaged with the article? So this, by this I mean like, how did you read it? Did you question the article? Did you accept it for what it was?
Did you do something with the article?

Ramiro 11:56
Okay.
That was a wonderful question. The last article I read on Softstack was the most recent newsletter by Elif Shafak.

Interviewer 12:14
Mhm.

Ramiro 12:16
Although I can't recall the title now, I remember she started with, you know, she always has a picture from which the inspiration for a newsletter emanates from.
So the particular picture is about a young lady holding a unicorn and she starts by
evoking some level of thinking in the reader to try to look into the picture and see what strikes them the most or what stays with them the most. And then she goes on to mention an experiment that was carried out between Japanese students and American students. And the outcome of
that research shows that Japanese students are able to talk holistically about a picture that a picture shown to them whilst American students spoke only about a specific aspect of the picture. And then she moves on to talk about how
environment shapes how people see things and how Japanese students from early on are like able to or train to see things holistically, like to see many aspects to things.
not just a narrowed path or a narrow perspective. But interestingly, she therefore move on to the question of our mind that never stops thinking or our brain, our brain that never stops thinking, how it is

Interviewer 13:54
The.

Ramiro 14:07
Contrasting to know that.
Without our brain, we will not be able to achieve the things we achieve in life. But we also get concerned when our brain overthinks. Like we get worried because it is something that puts us at like anxiety. So we get anxiety when we overthink.
or when we overthink or when we start to doubt ourselves. So the same brain that is able to help us to achieve things in life is also what brings some level of doubt. Some people, they get it like it is very worse. For some people, it is mild. So then she
comes up with a kind of solution which I'm trying to remember now, but in all, as usual, it was a wonderful read for some reasons.
I didn't engage with the post beyond liking it. In the past, I would drop a comment and also restock. I feel like I was probably so engrossed in the beauty of the article, or maybe a lot of people

Interviewer 15:09
Mm.

Ramiro 15:21
No, no, no, not like a lot of people, but of course, a lot of people had already dropped their comments. And maybe I wanted to read people's comments before dropping my, maybe, or maybe I just
felt okay with the fact that I enjoyed the article and also engaged by liking it more. But the article, as usual, did a lot for me, did a lot for me because I love how Ulrich Shafak always evokes in me like a deep level.
Deep level thinking, so, so I think that does it. Thank you.

Interviewer 15:59
Mhm.
That's really nice to hear, like how deeply you engaged with it and that you feel like it was meaningful to you. That's really nice. And can you tell me about a time maybe when you haven't quite been able to engage with an article that might be because it's a topic that you're not used to and maybe there's some terminology that doesn't make sense to you.

Ramiro 16:11
Excellent.

Interviewer 16:26
And when this does happen, how do you deal with not understanding it?

Ramiro 16:34
Well, oh, sorry, sorry, let me understand that very well. I used to be the people like the authors I'm already used to, or maybe on Substack generally, maybe I come across an article that I'm unable to relate to it and how

Interviewer 16:38
And.

Ramiro 16:53
I dealt with that.

Interviewer 16:54
Yeah, so something that you don't usually read and it's maybe a slightly more difficult topic and you haven't quite been engrossed in it as you just described. And so maybe it was something, yeah, that you haven't, that you found more difficult to understand. Would you continue reading it? Would you maybe
do some extra research, like how would you deal with that situation?

Ramiro 17:19
Okay, alright, thank you very much.
Eve.
This experience is anything to go by. I think I should mention that, excuse me.
I think there was a time in the past when I came upon an article on Substack pertaining to American politics. Like, I think somehow I didn't appreciate it. I'm not sure I read
the full article, because Softstack for me, subconsciously and consciously, is an app where I go to try to go into my mind. Like, I already live in a chaotic world.

Interviewer 18:12
And.

Ramiro 18:17
where I have to try as much as possible to be at my top level performance, to be able to stand my ground in the environment. Say, for example, I'm at work, we are at work hall, we are in the society, I'm talking about how things are not there.
in order in the country, say for example, corruption, corrupt politicians, vote buying, sharing food to buy votes. You know, those things that we already have to deal with in the real world. So,

Substack for me is
somewhere I go to try to understand my, like in our musings more. For example, like I said, I am a literature enthusiast. I feel that, I hope that is correct. Like literature, hearts and literature.

Interviewer 19:13
Yeah.

Ramiro 19:16
So, so, so that that does, if I I must be honest, that's a substark kind of does for me, and it will enable me to read from people who are shipping.
the world of literature, and also people who are upcoming. So I'm able to see their process and how they are dealing with this quest. So when I come upon particles on Substack outside of this, oh, I should quickly mention this too. I am a nature lover.
So when people post pictures of landscapes or of their journeys, travels, trips,
vacation, vacation. So I also engage with this well, but topics around politics, around the events, like the wars going on in the world. I noticed that I don't engage with them much on.
on Substack. Like I said, I also use Facebook.

Interviewer 20:23
Yeah.

Ramiro 20:26
Facebook A lot. And to an extent, I use Twitter if I need to stay abreast of an ongoing situation. On Twitter, you see live events happening in real time. On Facebook, you get the news. So on Substack,

Interviewer 20:34
Mm.

Ramiro 20:48
I tend not to pay attention to those kinds of articles. I don't know if that's able to.

Interviewer 20:54
Mhm, no.
Yeah, that makes sense. And it's really interesting to hear, yeah, because everyone uses it for very different ways from what I'm learning. And of course, I think, yeah, if you're engaging in these beautiful pieces, it's a really nice kind of place to escape from the stress of the world. So I really appreciate that.
My next question is about engaging. You briefly mentioned a bit earlier about restacking and commenting. Do you think you could tell me a bit more about how you engage with the articles

or if you have any examples of maybe connecting with someone on Substack and
Yeah, how does this engagement have an impact on you?

Ramiro 21:41
All right. Thank you very much. Do you know, I feel like, I feel like now it's a good time to mention something about Substack that I sometimes think about. Firstly, I feel like I...
I have not explored Substack enough, to be honest, especially with regards to connecting with people beyond, like beyond reading articles, liking articles. I feel like I am not, I'm not utilizing the

Interviewer 22:10
Mm.

Ramiro 22:20
networking aspect of Substack that much, to be honest. And I also sometimes feel like there are a lot other features on Substack that I am not availing myself of, if that's correct. So then I feel like

Interviewer 22:37
It.

Ramiro 22:39
having created that background, it would then be understandable that sometimes I am a long tank to restock articles because I feel like my network is so small, to be honest. Like I see notifications, stuff start asking me to connect with this person.

Interviewer 22:54
Yeah.

Ramiro 23:00
connect with this person. I don't know why I am naturally reluctant. When I see somebody I enjoy reading article, I immediately follow them. I immediately subscribe to them.
Then once in a while, when I see somebody I know personally who writes and I'm happy to find them on Softstack, I connect with them. So what that means is sometimes I restart.
because I want to be able to find the article later. And I think I'm also able to, I don't know what, what the future, what the future name is, but I feel, I know like no way you can bookmark, but I don't think it is called bookmark on Substack. I think maybe it is the same.

Interviewer 23:36

Mhm.
Yeah, or save or something, yeah.

Ramiro 23:55
Yeah, so...
But, but, but sometimes I restart with the intention of...
easily retrieving the article in the future. So I like because it's amazing. I restart with that intention of being able to retrieve it. And I comment, I love commenting, to be honest. I, especially when the phone
I definitely want to share my thoughts about it. So, on the aspect of networking, in my message, it's amazing. Today I received your message. I feel like I was surprised because I, yeah, I received your message. I was surprised because

Interviewer 24:38
Mmh.

Ramiro 24:43
In my head, I tried calculating how you keep about my profile because I feel like I'm eating on Stop Stack. That's how I feel. And of course, there's one other user of Stop Stack who
shares pictures from their travel. They live, they live like she lives with her children in a rural setting. So they are very close to leisure. So they have streams, rivers close to them, trees, greenery. So she shares pictures from there.
I tend to love them, and I don't know one way or the other we got talking, but of course we we we have since a very long time stopped talking. So those she and you, you are the two people I can recall ever connecting with on Substack. So I feel like that that was a very low

Interviewer 25:32
Mhm.

Ramiro 25:43
I'm not, I know this call is not about assessing myself, so, so basically I don't know if that's the way answers the question.

Interviewer 25:51
No, that's really useful. And it's interesting you mentioned about that you feel like you were hidden on Substack. And it just reminded me that it's a very interesting place where you can actually see, because you're restacking for yourself, but actually other people can see it too, even if they don't follow you because they're interested in the same articles.
So yeah, you can feel anonymous and at the same time, it's a really open space. So I like that. And I also...

Ramiro 26:19
That's that.

Interviewer 26:22
Yeah.

Ramiro 26:23
That's new knowledge for me.

Interviewer 26:26
Yeah, there you go. Maybe you'll have to make yourself more hidden.

Ramiro 26:27
Good.

Interviewer 26:33
Can you explain maybe any times when what you've read on Substack you've then used offline in the real world? So some information that you found from there and maybe you shared it with someone in real life or it made you think about things in a different way that you then behaved in real life?

Ramiro 26:54
Okay, okay, okay, thank you for that question. Yeah, of course. Like I said, okay, so I should start by saying that I have a number of friends with whom I share similar interests. So when I come across articles on Substack,
that I enjoyed reading, I immediately, or not, I should not say immediately. So I often use the share button to send into their WhatsApp, usually WhatsApp, usually WhatsApp because, yeah, it is easier.
I don't have most of them on Substack, but I have them on WhatsApp. So that means oftentimes we would even engage with the article. We will talk about maybe the article touches on something we had discussed in the past. So be like, OK, this is
either a fresh perspective or it confirms our perspective or it is destructive in a way. So for example, I remember I've shared articles from C for Mental Health with people that are also big on mental health.
And of course, I've shared articles from Enif Shafak to people in my timeline, like it's on WhatsApp. So, and yes, even if I don't consciously
express some of the things I learned on Substack, like from reading those articles, I feel like they are there in my subconsciousness. For example, Elif Shafak helps me to see the little things in life so that I'm able to appreciate them so that I'm able to

live a more, a better life from the perspective of feeling good. I mean, there was a time I struggled with it.
potential crisis. So it's not a nice place to be, but then it's also a way of knowing that I'm human. And what is most important is whatever I feel, it is not the end. It is how I handle that feeling that matters.
So I can either undo that feeling by letting it to pin me down or by taking from others. I mean, the truth is there is nothing new in this world, maybe artificial intelligence. So there's nothing in this world in the sense that

Interviewer 29:41
Mhm.

Ramiro 29:45
however we are feeling, whatever we are thinking, whatever situation we are going through, it is often true that some people have thought about it, gone through it, been in similar situation. So
It's now late for me to reach out to those people, however I can. If there are people who are physically present in my life, I want to talk to them. If there are people who are distanced away, but all thanks to social media, or yeah, social media, I can get to learn from them.
Amazing. So basically what that means is sometimes the things I learn from reading these articles on Substar, they are in my subconsciousness. They answer questions, they connect dots. I mean, you know, I mean, lines that have been strained somehow in my mind and
causing some level of destruction, causing some level of maybe unhappiness. So they helped me to connect those dots and I'm a better person for it. So one, I share the articles with some of my friends who share similar interests and I also utilize them in my life.
Especially subconsciously, thank you.

Interviewer 31:04
That's a really nice answer. Thank you for sharing that. Do you feel, I guess it's kind of related, do you feel it's easy to build informed opinions when using, when reading these like longer form articles? And what factors might influence this if you can't?
build an informed opinion.

Ramiro 31:28
Well...
That sounds like a really technical question because looking at it, the first thing that comes to my mind is if I want to make an informed opinion, then it probably implies that the article I read is argumentative. I may be wrong, but that's the first thing that
Comes to my mind looking at a question, because, for example...
So far.

The articles I read, they don't necessarily want me to pick a side. Or maybe, maybe, maybe informed decision also means

Interviewer 32:07
Mhm.

Ramiro 32:13
To be informed, like to be generally informed, like to now understand.
a bit more or largely more about an aspect of life. But if it means deciding between staying on this side or that side,
I would say that, to be honest, the articles I read on Substack, they don't request me, like, their action point is not for me to do that. Of course, I read articles from Elif Shafak where she is very much unhappy with the kind of leaders
the kind of global leaders that we have right now, where they are kind of warmongering, not even kind of, like they seem to find pleasure in flexing their moses. Like, I don't want to mention them.

Interviewer 32:58
Mhm.

Ramiro 33:12
because I suppose that's not the purpose of this conversation. But we see we see it happening around the world. We see a country, for example, that the image, the kind of the kind of paint the world is a war ready country. Like they want to continue to show to you that we are war ready.
And we also have some countries that they are going into other countries and causing kills, like causing, like leading a genocidal campaign. And we see that in the world and we cannot keep

Interviewer 33:49
Mhm.

Ramiro 33:52
keeping silence. So like Elif Shafak is more interested or is interested in how we are dealing with these. For some people who are not even in these places, they may look at the world and feel like the world is not a peaceful place, like the world is
is maybe by its very nature, is meant to be chaotic. So, and even though they are not directly involved in the world, they are struggling in their own mind. Like they are going through, again, a kind of existential crisis. So, if Shafak, for example, in
in some of our articles try to help you to deal with this or try to help you to put this in a better perspective that even amidst all the chaos, we can still see some beauties in the world. I don't know exactly. So we can still see some amazing things like

Interviewer 34:51
Yeah.

Ramiro 34:55
Some people, in their own little way, are leading campaigns towards a peaceful world in their little way. Or say, for example, somebody who sees a community where the basic thing or basic requirements of life
For example, water, they don't have it. They drink from gutters, they drink from dirty water, and that's the kind of social impact they are leading. So, for example, so they kind of helped me to shift my perspective a little bit from the chaos.

Interviewer 35:33
Yeah.
Sorry, don't let me interrupt.

Ramiro 35:42
Okay, yeah, yeah. So basically what I've been trying to say is that if informed decision implies helping me to put things in better perspective, I would say yes. And have there been times where I disagreed with

Interviewer 35:56
Mhm.

Ramiro 36:02
an article or a group of articles I read on Substance? I would say no, because mostly the articles that just want to steer good emotions out of me. And it is on
platforms like Facebook, like Twitter, where I see people go back and forth. Intellectually, as a matter of fact, there are people on Facebook, there are people on Twitter that I follow that. They bring out, they share articles where they share their opinions.
about a certain situation, could be local, could be international. I also see somebody else coming from that perspective, and that wonderful perspective, and you do this intellectually without being abusive and things like that. And of course, there are the have also read
articles that even from the very beginning, you know that this person is, I mean, I mean, is how to cause more problems for us. So I should do myself the good, or I shall put it, I should do myself a favor.
by just scrolling fast in that kind of article. So generally, I don't engage articles online with the intention of countering people's opinion. Not because I'm not there yet, but because

Interviewer 37:24
Yeah.

Ramiro 37:34
I'm not a good debater.

Interviewer 37:36
Fair enough. I wonder then if I shift the angle slightly so we speak more about your attention and the fact that Substack is primarily dealing with longer form texts, which basically is not like Instagram and Facebook like comments, just like
you get a lot of words. Do you feel that you're able to finish all of this in one sitting? And do you think paying this attention is beneficial when it comes to this sort of opinion forming?

Ramiro 38:20
King.
Thank you very much. So let me start, for example, with this wonderful feature on Stop Stack. If you are reading an article, like you start to read an article on Stop Stack, as you progress, Stop Stack
Let you know.
How much you have covered?
So that, for example, if you are unable to finish it in that one sitting, or...
at the time that I started reading it, it will let you know how far you have gone by stating the percentage. And if you complete reading it, it will let you know that it will mark the article as read. A wonderful feature. Also, if you choose to listen to an article,
Instead of reading it.

Interviewer 39:16
Mhm.

Ramiro 39:16
and you come off on Substack. When you reopen the application, it takes you back to that audio that you are listening to. Another wonderful feature. I love those two features because they help me to, one,
Ensure or try as much as possible to complete an article.
Probably before going to another one, and even if I must go to another one.
Whenever I come back to it, I see how far I went the first time I read it. So for example, you started reading an article and you reach 70%, like you cover 70%. I feel like when you come back later, you see that 70%.
First and foremost, you feel a bit happy that...

You covered 70% of the article at the initial time. I feel like this second time, you naturally feel this urge to complete it. I feel like that's how it's it. Like that's the psychology, the beautiful psychology to it. So I love soft star.

Interviewer 40:34
Mm.

Ramiro 40:36
for its long form. Like as a matter of fact, the fact that they are sticking to that makes a lot of sense. For example, Facebook, because they want to keep being the leading social networking hub, because they want to keep having a large market share. Facebook has
had to add a lot of newer features, a lot of them distracting. I mean, distractive or, yeah. So like I find that they distract me a lot. And somehow because I'm human, I find that knowingly, unknowingly, I get drawn into those
features. And before I know it, I waste a considerable amount of time doing that. A very good example, Facebook added reels. Facebook holds Instagram. I'm sorry, I'm beginning to voice my opinion. But it is how I felt when I realized what

Interviewer 41:33
That's good.

Ramiro 41:36
Facebook already has an Instagram. I wonder why they have to add...
Facebook reels. And why I can't simply just go to a particular section of Facebook if I want to series. No, you will attach it to your timeline too. It's not timeline to not timeline like to post that you'll see when you come to your page.
I feel like it is kind of saying that they don't know their target audience, really, because Facebook used to do for us, What SubStack does now. In the past, Facebook was your good to have for long form articles, like long
readings. So you see people who basically just, I mean, a very good example is somebody known as Strive Masiwa is an entrepreneur, I think from Zimbabwe. So he writes long form articles on Facebook in series, as a matter of fact. So imagine nowadays, you go

Interviewer 42:38
Mm.

Ramiro 42:40
Facebook. Before you know it, you open the first video and before you know it, it goes to another video and, you know, things like that. But on Substack, I feel like that is being maintained. Like if I follow a link, for example,

It lets me engage in that.
I think.

Interviewer 43:08
Yeah, I agree.

Ramiro 43:10
Hello!
It is, it is for them, for us.

Interviewer 43:12
Oh.
Sorry, you cut out for a second. Can you hear me?

Ramiro 43:19
Yeah, I can hear you.

Interviewer 43:21
Okay, I can hear you too.

Ramiro 43:24
All right. Basically, I was going to end with the fact that Softstack enables you to engage with an article fully, like in all its forms, before you choose to engage with some other things. Well, Facebook, you can be reading an article

Interviewer 43:38
Mhm.

Ramiro 43:47
and maybe by mistake or whatever you scroll down YouTube, it is possible and that thing catches your eye in the following post.
and destruction happens. So basically, yeah.

Interviewer 43:59
Yeah.
No, that's really useful information. So I have two more questions, but I just wanted to let you know that the call will cut out in 10 minutes because it's on like a one hour timer. If you wanted to, I could call you again afterwards because I don't want to make you rush through your answers, but only if you have the time.

Ramiro 44:03
You.
Yeah.
Hello!
It's fine, actually, if I, if I got that piece of information in the next 10 minutes.
Microsoft Teams is going to kick off.

Interviewer 44:39
OK, let's try and let's try and fit it fit it in in the 10 minutes then.
So, my second...

Ramiro 44:45
No, no, you didn't get me very well.

Interviewer 44:47
Oh, huh?

Ramiro 44:48
I feel like it. I was just, I was trying to recap. I was trying to see what you said, just to be sure that I got your information well.

Interviewer 44:59
Ah, yes, I was saying that there's 10 minutes left on the call and then it will automatically hang up. But I still have two more questions.

Ramiro 45:10
Yeah, so I wanted to understand, you said you will call me back. So I wanted to understand how you intend to do that.

Interviewer 45:17
I would just resend you the link to the team's email.

Ramiro 45:24
Or to the team's email, not my personal mail.

Interviewer 45:29
Yeah, sorry to your to your personal email, I would just resend another link.

Ramiro 45:29

But I want to be sure.
Not to be sure.
All right, all right, this is fine, this is fine.

Interviewer 45:40
So actually maybe perhaps I can do that now and then we can do the last two questions. Would that be okay?

Ramiro 45:47
I think that's being proactive, yes.

Interviewer 45:50
Okay, cool. I'll hang up now and I'll resend you the link.
Thank you so much.

Ramiro 45:57
All right.
The local.

Interviewer 0:03
Welcome back, thank you so much. So my second to last question, so these two are a little bit more abstract. More broadly, what do you think the value of paying attention like you were just describing that Substack allows you? What do you think the value?

Ramiro 0:03
Yeah.

Interviewer 0:22
of paying attention to a longer article has, not just for yourself but also for others.

Ramiro 0:32
Okay, thank you very much for that beautiful question. And I should quickly mention that I love the fact that the questions are making me to rethink. And honestly, I'm surprised. Of course, it may not be the responses I've been given so far.
may not be so, so, how do I put it, excellent, but then happy about, even me, happy about my responses. Because for example, this particular question now, it is bringing it into my mind, something I've been thinking about.
Deal with a lot of distractions in our world of today. I mean, if there is somebody alive now, I believe that if there's somebody alive now and they ask them a very simple thing, yet very impactful in their life, that they would like to change.

for me, and I want to believe a lot of people my age, maybe Gen Zs and Generation Alpha, for example, I believe we'll talk about destruction. Destruction is a big deal in our world of today. And I feel like Substack somehow helps you to
Eliminate destruction in a way.
Like I said, I'll keep, I have to keep comparing it to other apps that I use. For example, like I said, long-form articles.
teaches you patience, perseverance, like moderates your dopamine and also helps you to
Avoid jumping from one thing to the other. Like, what that means is...
on Softstack. Like I said, I read a lot for Elif Shafak. I think the name is George Sanders. I remember now. The name of the author is George Sanders. So when I all this also on that person, I know I'm just remembering them now. There's also Eleanor.

Interviewer 2:39
Room.
Mhm.

Ramiro 2:50
Zak. Zak is a Nigerian born or abroad based author. Probably the UK or the US. Maybe somewhere else. So
And there's also told Daniel that's also in a German born abroad.
to dig up their long form post and write ups on there. And if you can be patient enough to start from the beginning and get to the end, or maybe not in one sitting, but soft style helps you to keep that reading.

Interviewer 3:27
Hmm.

Ramiro 3:33
Or preserve your.
progress, such that when you come back, you still get to see that article. You see your progress. You quickly ask yourselves, do I want to finish this article? Give it something you have been enjoying. You want to complete it, right? So
I believe that in a way, when we look at it, shows that it can help us to deal with destruction, because then you are engrossed with that one article, you want to complete it, perhaps engage with it.
maybe even share it out. Like, of course, I'm aware that Subsac also allows you what like maybe there's something like home button where you will simply see what people are talking about generally, like people have shared their what's on their mind and you want to select one and start reading.
But the beauty of Substack is when you select that particular.

That article that you want to start reading, because Softstar wants to help you to finish it.
due to interest, like switching from reading to listening. And also, Softstack lets you engage in participating in live sessions. I don't know when Softstack added that. Maybe it's been a long time or it's something recent.
But I love it. Like, I've joined quite a number of sessions on substance. And I also feel like that's another wonderful feature. But I don't know why I tend to experience
network issues. So, but that's just, by the way, what that means is, like it is kind of incremental. You can read long posts, you can listen to that long post, or you can also engage in a conversation.

Interviewer 5:37
Mm.

Ramiro 5:40
Most conversation won't be less than an hour, so I feel like...
That's, or those are some of the things that Substack is.
helping me to build, like, eliminating destruction, allowing me to, to, like, you know, you don't, you don't, before you want to comment, before you know that people commenting, I mean, I see a lot of, I see this happen in lots of Facebook.
People actually comment on articles that they only read, maybe 1st and 2nd paragraph, or maybe just the heading, and they already have opinion.
I feel like it's because, one, they are not used to long posts. Two, they want to, you know, there's a lot of things on Facebook, so they want to quickly get from that and go to other ones. There's some people dropping full stop, full stop. Oh, to say, I like my comments that I can get to see this post again.
It is because the level of the department, for example, is very high. You want to quickly go from there, probably to another feature of Facebook, this marketplace. There is a lot of things. Well, on sub stack, I believe it is not like that. So you see people commenting.
Like, with with like, like they are thinking like they they they finished reading the article actually and the comments from their comments, you will know that they definitely read the article because they will see, for example, what strikes them in the article.
and you had their own thoughts to hate. So I feel like, I feel like there's a lot of things. So stack is helping me to do or build with long posts in this age of destruction.

Interviewer 7:48
Yeah, thank you for that answer and also recognizing that it's visible in the way that you see people engage with Substack I think is really interesting.
So my final question is, do you ever feel any sense of responsibility when it comes to what you're reading on Substack or sharing with your friends from Substack?

Ramiro 8:13
Please, do you mind defining what sense of responsibility means, maybe in this context?

Interviewer 8:20
Yes.

Ramiro 8:22
Okay.

Interviewer 8:23
Yes, of course. So what I mean by that is, do you feel like there's an element where you have to make a conscious effort in what you choose to read and share because it might have effects beyond that action?

Ramiro 8:40
Okay, like, sorry, I want to ensure I got that part, like sharing the article out to the world.

Interviewer 8:49
Yeah, so you mentioned that sometimes you share articles with your friends, but also just in picking exactly what you're reading and when you're saving articles and stuff, are you making a conscious effort that these decisions that you're making on Substack might
come with responsibilities or is it more of a personal private experience?

Ramiro 9:16
Okay, okay, okay, yeah. Thank you very much. I think I...

Interviewer 9:19
Does that make sense?

Ramiro 9:22
Yeah, yeah, yeah, it makes sense. I think I quite understand the question now. I would say it's a mix of both in the sense that sometimes I share out the article because I believe
Completely, that if the person I'm sharing the article to...
Read the article like I did, they will be better for it.

Interviewer 9:54
Mhm.

Ramiro 9:54

And like I earlier mentioned, there are mostly people who share my interest, like similar interests with me.
So.
What that means is...
Because it's a long post, it means that the author...
Most likely.
Considered all sides.
to the topic that they wrote about. For example, it's going to have an introduction. It's going to have like the body and it's going to have conclusion. I mean, this is something high school try to build in us.
to get used and to love essay writing, like to appreciate fully expressed thoughts. And not just expressing your thoughts, but going about it in a way that the person listening to you
is able to follow, not just follow, enjoy, not just enjoy, also you share something in them. So people sharing long form posts on SoftStack, to the best of my appraisal, I think they pay attention to this a lot.
which helps readers to connect with what they are saying. You see a lot of posts on other social media platforms that the persons simply want to get that idea, that particular point of view out. They don't get to sit down.
write it in full, like ensure it has all the components of a good article, probably even embellish it with some level of
literary devices and things like that. But I feel I see a lot of that on Substack. And when I share the articles out, it's an either be from a place of responsibility, somebody and I had a conversation in the past about something.
And now I have come across the article, an article that addresses that matter on Substar. I feel like when I share it to them, it is from a place of responsibility. Or sometimes I come across an article on Substar and
Maybe the person I want to share it with, we've never had a conversation around it before, but I just feel like since I enjoyed it, and so an extent, we tend to share similar interests. There is a likelihood that the two will enjoy reading the article. So maybe that's from
a personal point of view. So in essence, I feel like it's a mix of both sometimes.
out of responsibility and other times out of personal need, so to speak.

Interviewer 13:14
Mhm.
Yeah, thank you, Abdul. Thank you so much. It's been really interesting hearing your perspective and you speak very beautifully about the stuff that you're reading and it's inspirational. So thank you so much.

Appendix B.9: Interview with Adam
5 May 2026, 08:11am
41m 27s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded).

Interviewer 0:04
Okay, so if I could grab some consent, you're okay for me to use the audio recording and it will just be for the purposes of the research only.

Adam 0:12
Yes.

Interviewer 0:14
Great. So the way the conversation will go is it's relatively informal and I have some questions prepared. But if we have conversations based on your insights that go off those questions, that's okay too. So feel free to just draw on any experiences or opinions that you might have.

Adam 0:30
That's it.

Interviewer 0:33
So the first question is more simple. And I know you kind of mentioned this a bit to me in your e-mail, but how often do you use Substack and what made you want to download it?

Adam 0:46
I use it.

Interviewer 0:46
And where I might get your information? Sorry, other apps do.

Adam 0:52
I write every week in a I publish on my account in a chapter about from my book, The Voice of Neurodivergent, a book about discrimination against neurodivergent people with
basic insights that is useful for various policy makers and advocates. And also sometimes I write an article about a current news topic that is relevant for my
I'm A researcher on discrimination against neurodivergent people.

Interviewer 1:37
Mm.

Adam 1:37
And I've recently written an article about a report on neurodivergence by the Scottish Parliament. I've written about a Dutch television series about neurodivergence in a Dutch education system.

Interviewer 1:59
Okay, awesome. So you use it mostly to write things that you're passionate and that you're researching about. And do you, how often might you read on it?

Adam 2:04
Yes.
Can you repeat this question?

Interviewer 2:14
How often might you read other people's stuff on Substack?

Adam 2:18
Uhh...
One time in a day, I'm scrolling to my feet and then I will mostly read some notes, but sometimes I see articles from some people I know that.
When I'm very curious about this, and then I'll read the whole article, and especially, for example, when it's an article about neuro that I at work, I'll also place a write a comment when I tell about in the job board that.
I'm working on it right now.

Interviewer 3:02
Okay, nice. And would you ever get, if you're reading information just about more social, political and cultural things, do you get it from any other platforms or websites that aren't Substack?

Adam 3:15
About my subject, the discrimination against neurodivergent people, mostly on LinkedIn.

Interviewer 3:21
Mhm.
LinkedIn.

Adam 3:25
Yeah, and I also write it.

Every week, at least three times a block on my LinkedIn, and sometimes I add some blocks too. For example, yesterday we had our second World War Remembrance Day in the Netherlands. And, and the Holocaust is most, there is mostly paid attention to Jewish victims, but also disabled people were murdered in the concentration camps and the eugenetics. that to say was used during Nazi Germany and Second World War, is also existed also in many democratic countries like Sweden, for example, or the Netherlands, with rules that have some parts of eugenetics still exists and that's and yesterday I wrote in a post about it.

Interviewer 4:39
And can you tell me how long usually the articles that you're writing are? Are they short form or long form?

Adam 4:46
Not linkedin that.
The dozen does only allow less than 3000 sentence on a post, so I'm not able to write longer, but...
But it depends on the topic I write, right? Sometimes I write almost all the possible sentence, but older times I wrote it shorter, maybe because I'm able to.

Interviewer 5:21
Okay.
Okay, nice. Thank you. So the next section is going to be a bit more about slightly memories of articles that you read in the past. And can you remember the last article that you read and how did you engage with it? And by that I mean,
Was it something that you accepted? Was it something that you questioned or you disagreed with? And what kind of things did you do whilst you were reading it?

Adam 5:58
Last article I read on Orlandi.
The link to the I read this is the.

Interviewer 6:04
Or, like, it does any longer article.

Adam 6:11
Maybe, yeah.

Interviewer 6:11
or it could be the last article that you enjoyed.

Adam 6:14
And if the last one I'm searching for it now, it was a very interesting one.

Interviewer 6:21
Yeah, that's fine.

Adam 6:31
Yeah, wait a few seconds, Simon.

Interviewer 6:34
That's OK. Take your time.

Adam 7:01
Yeah, yes, it follows as someone on a I follow on a LinkedIn that has a newsletter with more than 5000 subscribers and the last article she wrote that I was reading.

Interviewer 7:05
Yeah.
Mhm.

Adam 7:19
Most full, it had a title, this is the important part of inclusion.
And she wrote about giving herself a space and why it was always hard for her. She shared some experience with meetings she had about inclusion.

Interviewer 7:49
Mm.

Adam 7:49
and asking, she's asking herself some questions like, when are we inclusive to ourselves and what does it mean to be inclusive to yourself? What does it mean to give yourself a space and let your voice be able to hear?
Also, in moments when you have the feeling that your eyes doesn't matter.
And...
And then in the rest of the article, she answers all these questions.

Interviewer 8:28
And was it something that you enjoyed reading? Did you feel like you could get to the end of it and you understood and agreed with most of the things she said?

Adam 8:47
And most of the content is very recognisable for me.

Interviewer 8:53
Third.

Adam 8:55
And yes, I can say I agree with most of the content that was written in that article. Yeah, and sometimes I'm sure you read some of things.
And you're thinking about from, hey, I also struggle with giving space to myself in some cases. For example, when I need to rest, I have a tendency to think I have to deserve rest.
And most is only when I have finished a task, but it's also because I've seen in my own life that when I say to someone I need some rest,
But I didn't get a space.
The Torres.
And then you internalise patterns like this.

Interviewer 10:08
Yeah, I get that makes sense. Thank you for sharing that.
Can you also maybe remember a time when you haven't, or more generally speaking, when you don't, as you said, the topic here was more recognisable to you. What about if the topic is not so recognisable to you and it's maybe something that you don't know the terminology or the context?
How would you deal with this situation? Do you think you would keep reading it, or do you think you would find something that makes more sense to you?

Adam 10:38
Outlook.
Most of the articles that I see where don't have much knowledge about it, or it has no relevance for my.
And chop, I scroll for further and I don't read the articles.

Interviewer 11:02
Yeah, fair enough.

Adam 11:02
Yeah, that.
Yeah, but there are many topics that I'm interested in, as some are based for my research and Projects I'm working on. I'm working on the job board on an effort for neurodivergent people and

mental health care.
Okay.
And so I and I've spoken with many people about mostly the app and also my research on the discrimination show. So many articles that are written by these people I read fully.
If I'm able to.

Interviewer 11:52
Okay, yeah, so you.

Adam 11:52
And sometimes I can add, sometimes I share also their articles and some on my LinkedIn and sometimes I add something for my own experiences and to research.

Interviewer 12:11
That was, that's really useful because that's the next question I was going to ask you was if you could tell me a bit more about your online engagement. So this could be both on LinkedIn and also maybe on Substack, but can you tell me your experience with commenting or messaging people or like building an online community or sharing?
if you have any examples to share that have had an impact on you.

Adam 12:35
Hey, yes, totally. I've, and this very nice story. I've already told about using LinkedIn and Substack, but I also use Instagram and...
very much and then in a few years ago I used also Facebook very much and these and I got once in a message from a city council member who said to me, Hi Adam, I see all.
the things you are posting on your Facebook and Instagram and Twitter. And I like your content and I thought, now I want to have something with you, someone with your knowledge. And my advice team, do you want to work for me? And I said, yes.
Hmm.

Interviewer 13:32
Mhm.

Adam 13:34
And, and it's uh...
And because of that experience with working for him in a municipality council, I came to the idea to do a research on the discrimination.
Because I've seen in many reports about discrimination, which I get mostly from LinkedIn.
And I have seen in the reports that there's no attention to neurodiversity when it comes to discrimination or inclusion. So every time there was a debate about discrimination, I want to

write a speech for him.
Well, I wrote that I want to pay attention to the discrimination against neurodivergent people. That you are only able to do that if you are working for a city municipality council member. And during my bachelor
Thesis, I thought I need to do more with this.

Interviewer 14:45
Even.
That's pretty amazing that you had that connexion that actually got you a job and then it had to do with the things that you're really interested in. That's a really cool story.

Adam 14:55
Yes, and also...
When I was working on the app with a friend I've known at social media due to some shared interests.
He is a work, he works, he owns a company that makes a software with the aim to create impact.

Interviewer 15:22
Eurep.

Adam 15:23
And, and, and then when I was working on the F, I shared a post about it on the LinkedIn and the...
And I sometimes got messages from people who say, hey, nice that you are working on it. I want, I've also some ideas for do you want to talk about it? And then I will say yes.

Interviewer 15:50
Yeah, that's really good to know that it creates like genuine impact in the way that people are sharing knowledge. And can I also...

Adam 15:56
Yes, and I am. I'm also able to share an article about my knowledge for a French organisation while I live in the Netherlands, so I'll get international with this.

Interviewer 16:07
Mhm.
So, do you think LinkedIn is better for this than Substack?

Adam 16:21
And what was your last question?

Interviewer 16:23
Do you think that this kind of community thing that you're describing, that it happens more efficiently or more effectively on LinkedIn than it does on Substack for you?

Adam 16:36
For of for me, the definitely is also so I used LinkedIn for a few years, very much.
Yeah, and I use it not so long.
And, and I've less followers on Substick. I've on Substick I've 20 or twenty-two, but on LinkedIn I have more than 2000, but on my LinkedIn sometimes.

Interviewer 17:13
Mhm.

Adam 17:19
I wrote a shorter article about in a topic, and then, and on a subject, I've written a longer read, and then I will share also the subject link in that LinkedIn article.

Interviewer 17:35
I was going to say that the, like the things that you're reading on LinkedIn and sharing both, do you tend to, is it a lot of links that take you outside of the LinkedIn app so you can read, read something like a longer report, like you were talking about reports? Are these
not written directly in the LinkedIn app, but people are sharing a link to them.

Adam 18:00
Yes, sometimes it happens that people see my article on LinkedIn and then go to my Substack article.

Interviewer 18:14
Mhm.
And same for the things that you're reading of others. Yes. Nice. And so I also wanted to know, you obviously have a lot of this online engagement, but has there ever been a time where...

Adam 18:18
Yes.

Interviewer 18:29
something that you've read, something longer that you've read online, has then had an impact of something that you do offline.

So this might have led you to do something in real life or a discussion with friends, something like that.

Adam 18:49
No, last time.
N.
And then I I read some articles up from a PhD researcher. He had the research on the autism and then rejection sensitive dysphoria. And then once he interviewed interviewed me.
And I read some articles that he wrote about this topic and his research, and sometimes I've shared it sometimes with some friends.

Interviewer 19:32
Mhm.

Adam 19:33
And also, someone I know has recently written an article that was based on a chatting meeting that she had with me about a topic.
And I've explained some things to her, and then, and with the things I've told she wrote in an article on the subject.

Interviewer 20:07
Okay, yeah, so you'll have these discussions. And might ever be anything bigger than a discussion, like it could be a community meeting, some kind of discussion where people are using this information, this deeper information online for like a bigger purpose in the community.

Adam 20:27
Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer 20:27
For example, your neurodivergent community, it could be.

Adam 20:29
Yes, on LinkedIn, I see it very much. Now I'm able to write, share articles from my subject on a French for French organisation on their LinkedIn page.
This Thursday, I'll share another article.
And then.
also for a British organization.
As so, and I for the French organization, I've also given a webinar recently about discrimination against neurodiving people for a policy makers.

Interviewer 21:14
Yeah.
Mm.

Adam 21:24
This is so I think I use my platform very well for it and so and when it is especially about online community with the neurodivergent people.
And I also share a user Instagram, very much, and some.
And, as the way with some of the people, I know due to using Instagram, I will go and go to some events with them.

Interviewer 22:04
Ohh yeah, OK.

Adam 22:05
And, and, and also talking about topics that we are interested in, for example, if I'm working on, and sometimes if they share on their own social media,
things that I use for my work. For example, I've written a book about discrimination against neurodivergent people and content I also share on my subs tech only for beta subscribers. But one of the things I wrote
About in that book is when it comes to care.
Yeah, healthcare. As someone I've seen on LinkedIn, someone I wrote about painting nails as healthcare or going to festivals with their clients as healthcare. Maybe it sounds strange for many.
people and the better hairdressers in a new style place. They can also have an influence that...
It may for it may will be for some people, for especially vulnerable people, to give in a safe space where they can tell about.
Some problems they face, and and as good painting it, Neil is a very easy and safer tool to create a more feeling of safety and and assisting it.
a festival with a client, it was a client that has a long history with eating disorder. And with the client, she was also practising some skills like
And I set boundaries, social contacts, and after that, the therapist went to a festival with her client. That client has made some friends where she with whom she will visit some festivals in the summer.

Interviewer 24:22
Very much.

Adam 24:41

So.
And I then they wrote about the benefits of strange kinds of therapy on LinkedIn.
Then you are thinking about it, you are writing in your book about it, you are reading further about it because I've also seen that there is some research done about when clients in mental health care ask for activities like shopping or
Or a painting in nails, for example.

Interviewer 25:25
Yeah.

Adam 25:25
And also and also what and also the I also for the debate in the Dutch House apartment about.
health care. I asked that one of these people who was once painting the nails, and I asked for information. I asked her, what do you want?
to tell in that debate and she told me what the government and the top does since I understand is that maybe drinking some tea or playing some games with the clients, it can be simple for most of them, but for many
clients, it can have a huge impact on their mental health because they feel it seen by some people who have time to think about another topics then.
And their hardships.

Interviewer 26:39
Yeah, that's very interesting and it makes sense to me. And did he write about this?

Adam 26:47
Yeah, I sleep.

Interviewer 26:47
Did you write something about it?

Adam 26:50
I've written a bit about these things in my book, as I already said.

Interviewer 26:56
Mm.
Yeah.
So the next question is a bit more about attention. And I want to know when you're reading longer form stuff, do you find it easy to read it all at once? Can you finish it in one go or might you get distracted?

Adam 27:20
Yes, sometimes.
I'm a bit more distressed, but it's mostly when I've in, for example, when I'm sitting on the toilet, I've read not that much time for long readings, but most of the content that are more
is suitable for longer readings. I click on the save and then I read it on time and I have more space to read it fully.

Interviewer 28:01
Sorry, my.

Adam 28:03
But if I read an article fully, I'm able to do it. Sometimes I am thinking it's a time of the day that makes me able or not able to do it.

Interviewer 28:03
Can you see me?
Mhm.
Yeah. And can you think of what things might, other things might influence it? For example, if you're reading on Substack or LinkedIn, is there anything related to the app that might influence how much tension you afford things?

Adam 28:39
The Substick app is only available for iPhones with version 17, but the update of the version of my iPhone X is.
Eurep.
version 16.7.15, but and then because of this, I'm not able to install a Substack on my mobile phone, so I'm only able to read it with the Safari app or reading it at my laptop.

Interviewer 29:12
Ohh.
And does that make it more difficult to look at this, the app?

Adam 29:25
Eurep.
Yeah, reading a private messages is only if possible at a desktop and not at a Safari Apple on my mobile phone. Yeah, and this is the subset page that I use on my mobile phone.

Interviewer 29:44
Yeah.

Adam 29:53
And and the better when I...
A bit better when I can get on notifications on my LinkedIn. I see it here, for example, notification on my LinkedIn, and then you are...
Are willing to pay attention to that, but because I don't have the Subsec app, I would I don't get these notifications, so I have to open the Subsec on my Safari, so...
you are doing a bit more so the psychology, psychological pressure.
Is a lower.

Interviewer 30:42
Yeah, and it requires more effort.

Adam 30:44
Yes, and something, and I think that that is why I do it less, but it's also that I have on a subset less audience than on LinkedIn.

Interviewer 31:01
Yeah.

Adam 31:02
Yes, yes, so every with the one with 10 minutes a day on the subject, I'm almost every day very satisfied and on the LinkedIn.

Interviewer 31:03
And can you?

Adam 31:18
I use more because I see there more, I see on LinkedIn all the, for example, the reports about discrimination and some other posts where I can think, hey, I'm making it.
I'm writing a comment there where I can tell about my research or my job boards or my app workforce, for example, but it's on Subsec.
I have things like this less.

Interviewer 31:56
Yeah, that makes sense. That's interesting, actually. Yeah, it really does depend on...
sometimes the image on the screen.
And so I'm onto my final two questions now, and these are slightly more abstract. So yeah, if you can just, if you're not sure how to answer, that's fine. But if you have something to say, that would be cool. So more broadly, to you and beyond yourself, so not just about you, but

including people around you, what do you think that the value of paying attention to longer pieces of writing can have?

Adam 32:37
Yeah, so someone on some topics say you have to tell many in that background information, and that is not it can read the user subset for it, but also yeah.
A function where I can read, write a lot of articles on LinkedIn.
K.
And I think, especially for good writers, both LinkedIn and Substec, can you use very well for LinkedIn? I think when I want to get more audience, I think you can use LinkedIn.
That better, because many more online, many LinkedIn has more users.
And, but, but for a subset, he has also a function that you can pay to subscriptions to people and LinkedIn doesn't have it.

Interviewer 33:43
Mm.

Adam 33:49
So, when you want to earn money, then you can use Substack, but Substack has all sort of function that if I read in the article, all my subscribers get emails.

Interviewer 33:49
Yeah, so it's more accessible.

Adam 34:06
And so, so this can fit it.
pressure to read articles and LinkedIn doesn't have that.

Interviewer 34:19
And do you ever feel a sense of responsibility for the things that you choose to read?
and the things that you choose to share online? Like, do you feel like it comes with a responsibility bigger than just reading and sharing that might affect others?

Adam 34:36
Yes, yes, totally. And mostly about discrimination against neurodivergent people, because I don't see it in reports about discrimination and the policy papers about inclusion. So on LinkedIn, I
I sent many times connexion requests to people who work in anti-discrimination research companies or at Dutch departments, for example, Department of Education or
Or the Department of Social Issues, and...

and job participation because I want to reach that audience with my work.
Yeah, and more.

Interviewer 35:34
Oh.
Sorry, I've got a bell ringing in the background, but I'm just gonna cheque that no one's meant to be here.
I don't think so. That's fine. Please continue.

Adam 35:50
And, yeah, and that is much easier on LinkedIn, I think, than on the Substack.

Interviewer 35:59
Mhm.

Adam 36:02
And you, yeah, and that is it.

Interviewer 36:02
Six.
Sorry, Adam, can you excuse me one second because I think the doorbell is ringing.

Adam 36:08
Okay.

Interviewer 36:09
I'll be one second.
Sorry.

Adam 36:38
Two.

Interviewer 36:40
He was saying...
about the responsibility of sharing.

Adam 36:46
Yes, and I do it because of the absence.
of neurodivergence in reports about discrimination policy papers about inclusion, debates in politics. I feel a very high responsibility to share my knowledge about discrimination against

neurodivergent people.
And sometimes.
I'm invited to give presentations about this topic. I've done it in a library in Utrecht. I've done it in the University of Applied Sciences.
And then Saturday day the 16th I do it another time.

Interviewer 37:29
Mhm.

Adam 37:41
And then I talk about the role of governmental agencies when it comes to children that are not able to go to school. Yeah, and and most of the connexions I have and will
on the and the people are giving these tasks to me. I've learned to know them with social media.
Yeah.

Interviewer 38:15
Yeah, interesting. And I guess then my final question is, is there anything that we haven't mentioned or that you haven't had the chance to speak about that you think is useful around the topic of sharing information and circulating knowledge online?

Adam 38:37
I think it's very important when people have feel their responsibility to also write about the topics they want to.

Interviewer 38:50
Mm.

Adam 38:57
It said that they have to think very well about which audience they want to read, for example, policy makers, healthcare workers, and then send many times connexion requests.
On LinkedIn, and not everyone, but much of them will accept that request, and sometimes it can lead to a nice things, for example, getting an internship or...
April to give presentations.

Interviewer 39:40
Yeah, like a sense of growth.

Adam 39:42
Yes.

Interviewer 39:43
Yeah.

Adam 39:46
No, it is so, and on my advice is that.
That said, people are thinking very well about this, and then with that thoughts are using their social media platforms.

Interviewer 39:54
Yeah.
Yeah. Awesome. Thank you for sharing. So that's all my questions for the interview.

Appendix B.10: Interview with Jaden
11 May 2026, 06:15pm
45m 52s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded)

Jaden 0:03
OK.

Interviewer 0:05
Okay, so this is just to double check that you're okay with me using the audio recording for the purposes of the research only.

Jaden 0:06
But.
Yeah, no problem.

Interviewer 0:13
Great. So it's a kind of informal conversation. I'll ask you some questions. If we go off piece to something based on your insights, that's fine. And yeah, make sure you're drawing from experiences of longer form stuff rather than short form stuff and also basically Substack.
So my first question is just a general, when did you download Substack? Why? And do you get your information from any other places?

Jaden 0:44
I downloaded Substat probably sometime maybe two years ago. I think it was probably the first time I downloaded the app and started to investigate what was on there. And since then, I've used it really.

Interviewer 0:57
Mhm.

Jaden 1:02
for deeper articles from various places. So obviously you get authors on there who are writing their own material. And in general, I tend to prefer that to short form, I guess partly because of my age.

Interviewer 1:20
Mhm.

Jaden 1:20

and growing up in a world that didn't have any digital media. So over time, I'm also an English teacher, so over time I would say that I'm far more comfortable with sitting down, reading something, slowly reflecting on it, thinking about it in that time in a sort of purposeful way.

Interviewer 1:52
Mhm.

Interviewer 2:06
Yeah, and if you could, how would you describe Substack to someone who hasn't used it?

Jaden 2:13
I would, that's quite difficult depending on what their frame of reference is, because clearly somebody, somebody who's 20 is not going to understand me talking about broadsheet newspapers 30 years ago.
I guess the closest thing, it's like a book of essays is a fairly close sort of parallel. It's saying, well, if you've ever read a book of somebody's essays and you've seen that what that is is basically long-form journalism, then that's really what it is. Or if you read a magazine that features long-form journalism,

Interviewer 2:31
Mhm.

Jaden 2:48
but obviously that's a fairly dying art as well, the number of magazines that do that seriously. Or if you read a serious newspaper, it's hard to find, hard to find what I describe as a serious newspaper, but I think that's the only way I could do that.

Interviewer 2:55
Yeah.
And do you think you're getting sort of your like political and cultural knowledge from these spaces more effectively than legacy and mainstream medium?

Jaden 3:02
Without talking to a person.
Yes.
Well, the only reason I look at legacy and mainstream media now is almost to see how bizarre the lies are, the exaggerations are, how far out people are in terms of the opinions, because a lot of it is just client journalism. So it's a very short step.

certainly in the UK, from an article in something like the Daily Telegraph, the Observer, even the Guardian. It's a short step from that to see who is funding that journalism.

Interviewer 3:46
Mhm.

Jaden 3:46
who is providing the funding for that newspaper. So I tend not to. We do have in the UK, and I guess if you know where to look, you can find these things elsewhere. I mean, I tend to go to a thing called the Canary.

Interviewer 4:01
Yeah.

Jaden 4:01
which is, yeah, which is serious journalism written by serious people. It's clearly got a left wing leaning, so it's biased towards the left. But what it focuses on it, to me, is what I would describe as factual reporting. So it tends to have in there a lot of quotable facts. It tends to have in there things.

Interviewer 4:17
Mhm.

Jaden 4:23
that are, you know, you can look at them and find out these things are true or not, which means that you can kind of factor in what their bias is, but it isn't too difficult to think, right, well, this is really what's going on. This is really how this story is playing out. And in the mainstream media, generally, that's not the case. And some of the things they say are unpopular.
which is also to me a key, it sort of says to me, here are people who are probably focusing on the actual facts of the case as opposed to just putting what they think. And they're also not paid very much.

Interviewer 4:47
Mm.
Yeah.
And I guess here you're touching on the point of like credibility and like the source of the information. And so I'm interested also to know when you're reading these articles on Substack, how, what is your awareness level of the credibility? Like how are you engaging with it in that sense? Like do you accept what they say is truth or
Perhaps otherwise.

Jaden 5:16
Yeah.
I think that depends because I'm well aware that I carry my own biases into anything and whatever I read is going to impact on what I read and how I interpret it. I would say it's quite hard to tell because on Substack,

Interviewer 5:30
Mhm.

Jaden 5:35
an author can say, well, this is who I am, and this is what I think, and this is what I do, but I don't really have any way of checking that with any depth. So to some extent, if it's on some step, I'm going to take it at face value, because it's hard not to, because

Interviewer 5:52
Mhm.

Jaden 5:54
There's only a little bit of amount of time in the day and every single time I read an article, I can't then spend 2 hours researching who is this person, what have they written for before, what have they said before, what are they doing on Twitter, what are they doing anywhere else.
You have to take some of it, I think, on trust. I guess part of the part of the thing that guides me is there on on Substack anyway.

Interviewer 6:16
Yeah.

Jaden 6:16
And I think if you weren't on, and if you go to some step, then I think that tends to make you a little bit more credible. I mean, you may be a terrible journalist, it may be that, you know, no professional organisation is prepared to take you on as a writer, but I think actually it says something about the person wanting some kind of independence.
wanting to be in a space that's not as co-opted as some other spaces are through social media, where they can go and write creatively about whatever their concerns are or their subjects are.

Interviewer 6:50
And are you able to draw upon a recent article that you might have read in the last month or so where, like, that you engaged with properly and you may have done some research afterwards? Can you remember a specific article?

Jaden 7:04
I can't know on that one because I tend to sort of read it and it kind of drifts off. It's interesting at the time.

Interviewer 7:14
It is hard to retain. I agree.

Jaden 7:16
but it's relatively hard to retain when you're not, I mean, you're studying, I'm not, I'm reading it to get a broad sense of what's going on. If someone said to me, could you do this, that and the other with this, then I'd obviously read it, make notes, things like that. I think at the moment, have you come across medium?

Interviewer 7:18
Yeah.
Yeah.
I have heard about it, yeah, but I haven't explored it.

Jaden 7:37
Right, well, well, medium is something something else, and medium is very, very good.
For America.

Interviewer 7:45
Yeah.

Jaden 7:45
Because there are lots of writers in there talking about the way America is today, particularly from a black perspective, so there's a woman on there whose article I read.
Trying to tell you who it is now, Alison, Doctor Alison.
whites, I think it is. And she writes, she's just done quite a long piece on the way that mortality amongst black children now is pretty much worse than it was in the days of slavery. That more black children now are dying in childbirth because of a lack of care.

Interviewer 8:07
Mm.

Jaden 8:25
something that's been well documented for quite a long time now. But she tends to say things that are, she's obviously very an educator herself. She's very highly qualified in terms of her own

education. And the thing that really gets me to read into it is not only does she write at length, So we aren't just saying, well, these are shocking facts. Here's my 2 paragraphs on my Instagram feed. They're actually far more thoughtful. Everything she writes is referenced.

Interviewer 8:59
Okay, yeah, interesting at the end.

Jaden 8:59
So, when I'm looking at things like Substack, if I want to say, well, OK, can I rely on what's here? And one of the things I can do is say, OK, there's a quotation there. Where's that quotation from? Have they referenced it? Or are they just kind of generalized? Have they read something and then just making general points?
So what she does is almost research based, that she will say something and she'll give her own opinion, but she'll also put a quotation in there. And just as you would in sort of education writing, there will be a source quoted. And if you wanted to, you can go and see what that person says and read the entire book if you wanted to.

Interviewer 9:18
Mhm.
Yeah.
Mhm.

Jaden 9:39
So, and I think that is what tends to attract me, I guess, about her and one or two other people who write as well is that, okay, there's some source material here. And there's a big difference between what someone like she will write and someone who's 21.

Interviewer 10:02
With opinion.

Jaden 10:03
Street that day, something more immediate.

Interviewer 10:06
And what about perspectives? Do you ever feel on Substack that you're getting a range of different approaches to certain topics or is your feed quite tailored to one kind of voice?

Jaden 10:19
Uhh...
If I had all the time in the world, I would probably just look at every single thing on there, but I

don't. I think it's, without really meaning to, I would suspect that I do tailor my own in the same way that an algorithm might tailor something for me on YouTube, and it will only send me YouTube.

Interviewer 10:33
Yeah.

Jaden 10:40
segments that it thinks I'll be interested in. So it looks at what I've already looked at. I think, oh, you like this, that and the other. Exactly the same for myself. I think I look and say, and I want things not necessarily to confirm my view of the world and that there may be, you know, things aren't quite as grim as they are, or at least there's some hope out there and there's some people on there who are like, but
that it's so polarized at the moment.

Interviewer 11:04
Mhm.

Jaden 11:05
That I don't particularly wish to delve into what some of the people, some people are saying, to some it's a bit deranged, even on, you know, even on Substack, there are people writing on there, and I mean, bad faith is probably a bit strong, but there are people on there who are writing, I think, well, OK, maybe. I prefer not.

Interviewer 11:12
On the other side.

Jaden 11:28
to get embroiled with that because I've got no influence over what they write.

Interviewer 11:32
Mhm.

Jaden 11:33
If I send a comment to them, I very much doubt if they're going to change what they're writing just because I've said, well, you know, I think maybe a bit wrong there. And that kind of conversation that you can have in those forums with the person who's writing it, one, the man might not even read your comments. Two, if they do, then their answer tends to be, oh, yeah, thanks for responding. So,

I don't very often comment on anyways, that for me to say this is really good writing. Really informative, found out a lot that I didn't already know.

Interviewer 12:04
Yeah, so you bring up kind of my next question as well is how often might you be commenting on posts, engaging online, maybe messaging people? Does that happen to you on Substack?

Jaden 12:15
A little bit, yes. Yeah, it does. I mean, the people I follow, if they say something that I think is particularly meaningful, insightful, then I might say something about that and let them have that. If it's a comment section, I might occasionally find myself writing quite long pieces if what they've said is something that I maybe disagree with or think.
that from my own experience I can maybe add to. But with no sense in my mind that something's going to read that, because sometimes the number of comments on there, it's quite clear that they're just going, I'll pick one out of every 20, or I might pick the first three, or they might just do 2 on one particular topic and then they're moving on to something else.

Interviewer 12:45
Yeah.
No.

Jaden 12:57
So they don't have the time to read all those in the same way that I don't read every comment because there's just too many of them often. So.

Interviewer 13:04
Would you say you have some kind of online community on there or it's more like binary, just comments and likes?

Jaden 13:12
I would say for me it's more, I would say it's more binary.

Interviewer 13:12
The.
Yeah. And do you have any experiences using what you read on Substack and taking it offline? So something that might have persuaded you to think a certain way or you might have had a discussion with someone in real life. Can you recall anything like that?

Jaden 13:32
Not really, no, because I tend to avoid talking about things that are political with very many

people, because it is quite difficult to gauge, particularly in the UK at the moment, where people are coming from. So certainly when I'm socialising, I tend, and I think a lot of people are the same, I mean, I can go out with people.

Interviewer 13:48
Mhm.

Jaden 13:56
And we won't talk about politics.

Interviewer 13:58
Yeah.

Jaden 13:58
Because.
or anything like that, because it tends to be quite surface because people are very wary or aware that people's political views might be very different to theirs. And rather than find yourself, yeah, having no one you can talk to, it's nicer to be able to talk about the weather and things with somebody at least.
and avoid things that are not going to go down very well. And I think that's become a real problem, certainly in the UK.

Interviewer 14:22
Yeah.
And yeah, if it's not a discussion, might it be something else that you didn't share maybe with another person, but maybe you learned about a topic and then you acted on it in real life.

Jaden 14:42
And that's a good question.
Ohh, one second, listen, it'll be my only delivery.

Interviewer 14:46
Oh, that's alright.

Jaden 14:59
Yeah.
But...
The ubiquitous Amazon. Something I would love to be able to do with that.

Interviewer 15:15

Hello, everyone.
Yeah, so my question was about if you've acted on something that you've read online on Substack.

Jaden 15:29
I would say that, over time, I've read a few articles on Substack, a few articles in the Canary and Medium, and one or two others, and I recently...

Interviewer 15:39
But I am.

Jaden 15:44
changed my political affiliation.

Interviewer 15:47
Mm.

Jaden 15:50
based on what I read there. I don't know, are you familiar with Owen Jones?

Interviewer 15:56
Yeah, I'm familiar.

Jaden 15:58
Yeah, okay, so people like Owen Jones, there's a guy on there, Council Estate Media.

Interviewer 16:04
Yeah.

Jaden 16:05
Yeah, yeah, you'll see where I'm going, so, so I've been looking at those, and initially...
I joined your party.

Interviewer 16:14
Yeah.

Jaden 16:15
in the UK.

Interviewer 16:16
When they started.

Jaden 16:17
when they started, when I was one of the 800,000 who joined initially, and over time, looking at various articles, looking at things they were saying, it seemed that things were not going as swimmingly as a single-minded socialist group of people might want something to go.

Interviewer 16:24
Mhm.

Jaden 16:40
and I've actually moved to Green Party.
And a lot of that has been about, not mixing with people, because I don't know very many people locally or politically active in the Green Party or in your party, but what I did see for me was that it could take 20 years before your party agree with each other enough.

Interviewer 16:44
And.

Jaden 17:03
to actually get round to doing something meaningful and useful. Now I may be completely wrong,
But to go from 800,000 people.
To their actual membership.
Is a big drop, and all that enthusiasm initially was just dissipated away in sort of.

Interviewer 17:16
Yeah.

Jaden 17:22
I mean, what seemed to be ridiculous infighting, really. And I find to think it's a new party. But then the other thing you see is commentary on the sort of things that are going on behind the scenes, which came through the Canary, and was really about the fact that there were two factions almost.
in your party. And in the end, I thought, well, that's not something I can get behind because that's one of the reasons why I'm very disillusioned like a lot of people are with politics. So taking on board what people say, particularly about the Green Party, I've moved my affiliation to the Green Party. I don't think I'd have done that if I hadn't have been able

Interviewer 17:52
Mm.

Jaden 18:02
to read some considered views and actually spend time thinking about it and looking at some of the detail. Because too often it's sort of sound bites and this, that, the other. And that's written really to get your attention as opposed to get you to think about really what the issues are. So.

Interviewer 18:05
And the details.
Interesting.

Jaden 18:23
In the real world, and it is that.

Interviewer 18:23
Interesting.
Yeah, that's a big one. Thank you for sharing. So this next section is a bit more about attention. You actually mentioned that earlier. Can you recall the last few articles you read? How was your attention? Were you able to finish the article? What usually happens?

Jaden 18:43
I think I've become aware that it is very, very easy to have your attention span diminished, depending on what you do with your day. I mean, people talk a lot about mindfulness and no, I don't think people talk about it all over things.
But what I found was that having gone through a life where...
Interesting.
Visual articles were almost impossible to go by, and you'll have to imagine that we're talking about the olden days here, 'cause...
When I started as a kid, as a child, there was nothing on TV for children. So you learn to play and things like that. So it's very, the word I'm going to look for here.
enticing. The idea that on YouTube I can go and look at a quarter of an hour of something exciting, colourful, really well narrated, really well presented and it's very easy to get sucked into that. But over time I found that there's too much. So when I was
a teenager was going to college and university, it was either read a book or listen to music and they were the two media.

Interviewer 19:58
Mhm.

Jaden 20:02
And so sitting down and reading something for two hours or listening to an album from, either a double one from start to finish, was something that people did very easily and I could do very easily. I now find that I have to make a conscious effort every day to find the time to sit down and read things properly and spend time and read them and consider the language and consider the words. And I think that's one of the strengths of something like Substack and I have to be honest to say it gives me a bit of hope.

Interviewer 20:28
Mhm.

Jaden 20:35
That, that there's a demand.
that kind of writing, that kind of journaling, and there are lots of people who are prepared to sit down and hopefully sit down and read it and get something out of it.

Interviewer 20:47
Yeah, it's really interesting as well that you noticed that shift like in your lifetime, that that change and...

Jaden 20:53
But I've noticed it myself. I mean, I mean, it is incredibly seductive, that's the word I was looking for, seductive to be able to look at those things, particularly when you come from a time when you could not find anything, that literally you could go and play with your friends, you could listen to an LP and you could read a book.

Interviewer 20:55
Yeah.
Mm.

Jaden 21:14
And if you were lucky, at some point for an hour a day maybe, there would be children's specific TV, but there'll be nothing else. And now...
I could get up.
and there'd be something every 10 minutes if I wanted there to be. And that's really distracting, but it stops people thinking properly as well. And it's seductive because it's like your opinions have been given to you as opposed to you making up your mind and forming your own opinions.

Interviewer 21:36

Yeah.
Yeah, and some might even say addictive.

Jaden 21:45
I, I would say absolutely.

Interviewer 21:47
Yeah. And would you say that reading Substack articles, you kind of did mention this, but the more you practice it, that maybe you're finding those capacities are improving?

Jaden 22:01
Yeah, I do. I mean, I mean, because what I'll tend to do is try to put myself in a space where I can give that some actual time. So I'll say, OK, that looks like a really good article. I really want to read that properly. And I will try to make sure there's no other distraction. So rather than having music on at the same time or the radio on,
or something going on in the background, I will just sit down and read that, maybe get a coffee, and I will just sit down and take my time and read through it.

Interviewer 22:28
And is there anything about the formats, whether you're reading it from the Canary or Medium or Substack, the way the visual effects of it that might influence that?

Jaden 22:39
I don't think so. I mean, I mean, for me, in an ideal world, they'd be magazines.

Interviewer 22:46
On paper, yeah.

Jaden 22:47
and they'd be on paper.
Once, once it's on a screen, then I, I, it's on a screen, and although I can understand that people do think carefully about the way things are designed.
For me, if it's on the screen, it's on the screen, I would much prefer it to be on paper, in a magazine, in a book. But that's because I didn't grow up with technology and technology is something that came into my life. It's not something that was part of my life. So my children are very different, my children, you know.
For them, a laptop is a laptop, and that's how they consume virtually every single thing in the world, but for me, I would much rather have a new space magazine.

Interviewer 23:27

Yeah, makes sense. So on my final two questions now, and they're slightly more abstract, but the first one will be more broadly, so not just for yourself, but for others as well, what do you think the value of paying attention to a longer article has?

Jaden 23:47
I would say that it's very much about having the time to form your own opinion and think about what you're reading. A conversation I did have with someone, which kind of fits into this, I actually did have a conversation with somebody about
what was missing in terms of the consuming of digital media.
And my feeling was, when I thought about it, that it just takes away, for a lot of people, it takes away their power to really think about things. Because of things like algorithms, there's not really a free choice of what you tend to read because you're getting a curated view of the world that's curated for you.
So even if you take time reading, for some people what they'll be reading are things that just confirm what they already think. And there was a time when no matter, even though you knew that newspapers had bias,

Interviewer 24:40
Mhm.

Jaden 24:49
they still presented both sides of the argument and you could still choose whether you believe them or whether actually you sympathise with something else. And that critical thinking is a real, is a skill.
it's very difficult to look at something and work out where it's actually coming from if you don't have that and if you don't practice that. And being an ex-teacher, I know that the curriculum in schools in the UK, for instance, is promoting that less and less and is very much pushing a straightforward
Get qualifications.
in these subjects, these other things are too ephemeral, and the things that, you know, people are suggesting are ephemeral, like the arts, actually are places where people do have to think, where people do form opinions. And at the moment, I think that is coming under threat that they don't want.
This sounds a bit conspiracy theorist, but, in general, my impression is that we've moved from a time when...
People were encouraged to think for themselves and that was seen to be a very good thing. And that education was fantastic and great and we ought to make it available universally to everybody.

Interviewer 26:06
Mm.

Jaden 26:06
to a time when access to education is being limited in lots and lots of ways. And that notion of critical thinking is being subsumed by people who are saying, well, okay, this is what you should think, or this is what common sense is. And it is ridiculous to think anything else could be the case.

Interviewer 26:29
Mhm.

Jaden 26:29
And it's really narrowing the terms of debate on almost anything you can think of, no matter whether it's design, whether it's building, whether it's housing.

Interviewer 26:41
Yeah. Yeah.

Jaden 26:41
So, for me, yes, that is something that, you know, is being eroded by the, you know, by people's submission almost to the world being presented to them in a way that prevents real deep thought.

Interviewer 26:59
Yeah, it makes sense.

Jaden 26:59
That makes it easier.

Interviewer 27:01
And do you ever feel a sense of responsibility for what you might be reading online or sharing with others?

Jaden 27:11
In what sense?

Interviewer 27:13
Do you ever feel that the things that you're reading or potentially sharing, that that might have a knock-on effect? Like the information you're consuming, do you do it with care?

Jaden 27:22
Naively, very naively, very naively, yes. So if I see something that I think...
say something useful, important, different, might make people think. They don't have to share that with other people. I don't necessarily feel responsibility for that, though, because at the back of my mind, I'm thinking, well, some of these people won't get past the first two paragraphs.

Interviewer 27:49
Mm-hmm.

Jaden 27:49
You know, I think people have lost a little bit of the tolerance maybe they used to have.
in terms of looking at things and reading them through and thinking about it.

Interviewer 28:03
Yeah, makes sense. And then I guess finally, if there's anything that we haven't discussed that you think is useful to or important about the topic of sharing and consuming knowledge online, that yeah, that we haven't touched upon, is there anything you can think of?

Jaden 28:23
Uh, I don't think so. I guess the one thing is that...
I would suggest that because there's so much available online and so much you can get access to in your own home, that it probably does work against, I don't know, community, against people spending as much time with each other as they used to, against people having

Interviewer 28:49
Yeah.

Jaden 28:53
conversations, proper conversations with other, where they're trying to explore things, because I think a lot of people now, I mean, that's probably one of the reasons why you tend to get much less of that, is because people think that, you know, they know most of it anyway, and they've got it online and they're not going to think anything else. I think there's something there that...
That it kind of stops people looking out, maybe as much as they used to, in terms of.

Interviewer 29:19
I'm glad you mentioned that one because that's kind of a key interest point of mine, the community side of it.

Jaden 29:26

Yeah, well, I think, I think online communities are okay, but they're curated communities. And, you know, it isn't that long ago where people were in a community with virtually everybody else they lived near or around, even if it was only to talk briefly to. I think a lot of that has gone because people just go there.

Interviewer 29:32
Mhm.

Jaden 29:47
and find their own community, which tends to be quite narrow.

Interviewer 29:53
Yeah, it can be scary. We might be losing our community. So those are all my questions. Thank you so much for taking part.

Appendix B.11: Interview with Isha
16 May 2026, 09:54am
33m 38s
Location: Microsoft Teams (Recorded)

Interviewer 0:04
Okay, so this is just to get your consent that you're happy for me to use the audio for the purposes of the research.

Isha 0:05
The.
The.
It.
Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer 0:13
Awesome. And then, okay, what's that? So the first question is, and by the way, it doesn't have to just be sub-stack that you talk about. If you have read other like longer form articles, you can incorporate that into it too.

Isha 0:21
Mmh.
Mhm.
Cool.

Interviewer 0:29
Can you tell me a bit more about how often you use Substack and why you use it and why you downloaded it in the 1st place?

Isha 0:31
Yeah.
Yeah.
I've actually been using Substick a lot less frequently recently. I originally downloaded it probably a year ago and narcissistically it was to write my own stuff more so than to read other people's. But obviously that's been like a lovely
Like, some part of it, but...
I...
Once I downloaded it and started, I think I published my first piece and then I started kind of, it was funny the way that the algorithm kind of like shifted to the work that I posted because then I

went on the kind of like thought daughter side of Substack. And yeah, I read stuff from there and At its height, I was probably reading like two or three articles a day, I'd say.

Interviewer 1:29
Yeah.

Isha 1:32
But they were probably easier to read than a lot of the other stuff on Substack.

Interviewer 1:37
What, what was the, what's the thought daughter? I actually don't know what that is.

Isha 1:38
The.
It's funny. It's kind of like very introspective, very reflective people who are in their early 20s, like us, who are kind of reflecting on the life experiences that they've had so far. So it's all quite like personal stories, anecdotes, and kind of like
I think it's kind of like that form of therapy for a lot of people. And the reason I think I've actually stopped, because I think I just got to a point where I was like, and this is rich, because a lot of the stuff that I write is about that, but it's like, it's, some of it is quite like,
Smug. It's a bit like, you know, people talking about having all of this knowledge about things and it's like, we're actually so young. And I think that a lot of the time people can like live in their own shell a little bit and it becomes like that kind of an echo chamber of like, I'm actually thinking too much about myself right now.

Interviewer 2:37
Okay, yeah.

Isha 2:38
That's why I had to like weed myself off it a bit, because I was like, every day I was like reading something about an experience that somebody has had and like this, a self-diagnosis that they've given themselves. And like, I think I just got to the point where I was like, I need to stop thinking about myself as much.

Interviewer 2:54
Like, analyzing the self and more outputs.

Isha 2:55
analyzing every single behavior, every single emotion that I have. But yeah, I would like to

revisit Substack and kind of reprogram the algorithm a bit, because I feel like there's so much out there on there.

Interviewer 3:01
Exactly.
Yeah, so would you say that the stuff that was popping up on your feed or whatever was quite of like 1 perspective of 1 cognitive?

Isha 3:18
At.
Yes, literally all like middle class young girls who are talking about breakups. Some of them are, you know, are quite deep and really like intellectual and clever and impressive. You know, it's still like, it's still a hard thing to do, I think, in some ways, it's like a brave thing to do.
being vulnerable on the internet, but I do think that it became.

Interviewer 3:40
Mm.

Isha 3:43
Quite, it just became quite a lot, and...

Interviewer 3:46
And did you ever try to look for articles like that make an active choice to look for different types of articles or do you just?

Isha 3:55
Not really, to be fair. I probably gave up too easily there. I think that I, a lot of the time I like taking inspiration from these kind of apps. So I think that I was like, I didn't really know where to start with it. But I think, yeah, I think I did a little bit, to be fair. I think that like when I, if I was like researching a project, I would like, you know, look at fashion articles.

Interviewer 3:55
Right, that was opportunity.
Mm-hmm.

Isha 4:19
or like Culture Insight articles or anything like that.
But I really like them, that guy, Cafe. He's got a great stuff. So I was like getting onto that for a bit and that was that was nice, I think. Yeah, there's definitely room to like shape it to what you want it to be.

Interviewer 4:29
Oh yeah, I think you've seen that.
And where else do you get, whether it's social, cultural or political, like commentary, where else do you get that kind of information online?

Isha 4:47
I read a lot of online mags. I read a lot of the bookseller, which is like this, it's like an app and it's like you have a subscription to it and it's kind of like if you want to be in the publishing industry. It's basically kind of like an online newspaper magazine about books.
That are like either the thing right now, what did you say, sorry?

Interviewer 5:07
Then.
I was just agreeing, I was just.

Isha 5:11
Yeah, books, yeah. Either that are like trending right now, like top of the charts or like authors, like authors to watch or like genres that are, and I think that that's quite interesting because I kind of, that's kind of how I get my, like sources are kind of like vicariously. It's like, it's like, like a direct source.

Interviewer 5:27
Yeah.

Isha 5:31
It's usually like what is being talked about within these books or within this fashion trend, you know.

Interviewer 5:37
That's interesting. And who writes the articles on the bookseller? Anyone?

Isha 5:39
It.
It's people who work with a bookseller and they don't really do freelance stuff. So it's not like, it's not like contributing writers, it's like their team.

Interviewer 5:45
Okay, what?
Okay, cool. But it's like longest longer articles.

Isha 5:57
Yeah, they do have long-form stuff, but I think where else I read I've had such a mind blank.

Interviewer 5:58
What?

Isha 6:03
Um...
I remember right now. I'll definitely remember by the end of the call.

Interviewer 6:09
It's fine. Maybe it'll come up. My next question. OK, can you remember the last article you read, whether it be on Substack or anywhere else, just a longer form article or one of the last ones you read? And can you describe to me how you
engaged with it. So this might mean did you like accept it for what it is? Did you question it? Did you just read it and leave it alone? Like what kind of behaviors did you carry out?

Isha 6:33
Okay.
It.
The last one I read was interesting, actually. It was an article about listening bars, like sound bars, because they've become a huge thing. It was on Canvas 8. That is also, because I have a subscription to Canvas 8 now, I can read articles on there, so I read some of their stuff as well.

Interviewer 6:43
Okay.

Isha 7:01
which are really interesting because the reports are quite low and they're like 5000 words, 2500 to 5000 words. I mean, that's a tangent. This was about listening in sound bars and because you know how like friendly pressure and like those like bespoke speakers have become like a really big thing.

Interviewer 7:11
Mm-hmm.
And.

Isha 7:22
And in London now, there's just like so many like listening bars. And it's very, they're very like,

they're quite like a chic, classy thing to do instead of like, it's kind of like reinventing the club scene almost.

Interviewer 7:34
Yeah, I've like vaguely heard about this.

Isha 7:37
Yeah, it's funny. At first I was like, this is such a weird, like...
subculture. I was like, there's nothing wrong with clubbing. I was like, why do we need to make this whole other thing? But obviously, that is just the nature of society. But it was an interesting read, actually, because, yeah, at first I had that reaction of like, this is this is so annoying. Like, why are we why are we making
something else that's like, you know, they're kind of, it's kind of like making music like this like elitist thing, where you have to like sit down in a very chic bar and like buy a very expensive cocktail. And like, that's the way that you listen to music. So that was my first reaction. I was like, don't really, don't really like that. But then by the end of it,
And upon further reflection, I was like, I understand the value of listening bars for people who find the club too intense. And obviously, like the club is, you know, or like old school clubs, like that is how the original form of like interacting with music in my head.
But that's only my perspective, you know. And like for me, that is a proper way to like unwind and like let loose as like festivals and clubs. But for some people, it might not because I can understand that it's like a very anxiety inducing environment. So maybe listening bars are that thing that are

Interviewer 8:56
Mhm.

Isha 9:00
making it more accessible for people who don't want to be in a crowded room. And that was kind of what the article kind of concluded was like, just that like adaptability. And also, I think now people focus a lot on like craftsmanship.
in a lot across all sectors. And obviously these speakers are like beautifully designed. And yeah, I think that people really value that because it feels like more of like an investment. So that was like an interesting takeaway. I was like, okay, there's more to this than I had originally thought.

Interviewer 9:32
Mm.

Isha 9:38
When I read it, so I don't have that.

Interviewer 9:39
Yeah, so if anything, like the depth of it.
helped you to come to like a new understanding that you didn't have before.

Isha 9:46
Yes, which is always the case with me for writing, I think, reading and writing, but I think it's like, it's broadening your mind to different perspectives and thinking of things in a way that you haven't thought about them before. And that's what I always say, like when I'm interviewing for like publishing jobs, people, they're always like, why publishing?

Interviewer 9:55
Mhm.

Isha 10:05
And I'm always like, because I think that books and words and writing have such a power to introduce you to new perspectives. And I think that even if you like quietly disagree with it, there will be something that like sticks with you. And you're like, yeah, actually, you're onto something.

Interviewer 10:24
Yeah, I like that. And then is there ever, have you ever, or when you have an experience where you're reading something that you find more difficult and maybe you don't understand the topic, maybe it's something new to you, how do you approach these kind of situations?

Isha 10:25
Yes.
It.
Yes.
Bing.
Mm.
That is a good question. Yeah, I definitely have a lot. I feel that a lot. I think that sometimes like when I read political things, I feel quite like intimidated by them. But I will...
On a good day, if I'm feeling up for it, I will read further and I will kind of like, if there's like a word or a topic or something that I don't know, I'll kind of research it further. Or I'll ask my dad, to be honest, he's usually quite good at that. Or I'll go to a podcast if it's something that's like really stuck with me.

Interviewer 10:58
Mm.

Isha 11:16
I think that sometimes, like, in taking it in a different way, is sometimes a better way for it to sink in. I think that sometimes, yeah, if it's a really complicated topic, I actually turn to podcasts. I think it's just a different way of

Interviewer 11:26
Mhm.

Isha 11:35
of Latin.

Interviewer 11:37
And also interesting that you say you ask your dad, like, so you'll say to him, I read this article, can you explain it to me? And then might you have a bigger discussion based off of that?

Isha 11:39
Mm.
Yeah.
Yeah, definitely. He's always like, he's always like drip feeding me information. And I think that obviously, well, while you have that thing with your parents, they're like, I don't want to learn anything from you. But then after a while, like now I really value it because I'm like, okay, like actually you've been telling me very important things for a long time.

Interviewer 11:58
Mhm.

Isha 12:08
And yeah, I really, really value that. I think that within that as well, if I was to, you know, kind of disagree with him, I think that he would totally like accept that. I think that he just, you know, he wants to like make sure that he's telling me the important things. I don't know how he remembers.
everything though. I don't know if you have this with your parents. My dad is literally like his brain. He's like, he's like kept like news stories in his in his brain from his whole life. I'm like, what the hell? It's actually impressive.

Interviewer 12:30.
No people that can do that. Is it really freaky? It makes me feel really self-conscious and I'm like what did I have for breakfast yesterday?

Isha 12:40
Is it?
David.
I know, same, and like dates and numbers and stuff, like it's crazy.

Interviewer 12:50
Yeah. And we kind of touched on this already, but can you think of a time recently when you, and if not, don't worry, when you tried to look for an article that was different from stuff that you usually read?

Isha 12:50
Yeah.
Mm.
Trying to think.

Interviewer 13:31
Hmm.

Isha 13:31
I think the department store stuff. I've never read anything about that. When I was researching for the article that I was writing about Bloomingdale's, I was having to read loads about retail and department stores. And they were really heavy on statistics and like people based like insights and people based statistics and behavioural examples. And that was like a

Interviewer 13:36
Yes.
Oh yeah.

Isha 13:55
a whole another world to me because they were like, they basically, they were using like TikToks as like studies, as like people examples. So like if it was like, you know, how people interact with department stores, like TikTok is now like an accepted like reference point. So all of those articles, I read so many and

Interviewer 14:05
Mhm.

Isha 14:16
Yeah, they were, yeah, that, that was.

different care. I think that they, I found them like to be quite repetitive because they're kind of laid out in like almost like a psychology essay format. You know, you have like your like your brief at the beginning and then the context and then the study and then the findings.

Interviewer 14:36
Well, and they use like references and stuff. Interesting.

Isha 14:38
Yeah, exactly. And they have to have like 5 data points and like it's all very like formulaic. And I think that the I've never read long form stuff that is that formulaic before.

Interviewer 14:50
And did that, how did that make you feel about what, like, they were trying to say? Like, did it make you feel it was more credible?

Isha 14:51
But.
Yeah, I think I think that statistics actually do have a lot of value to be fair.

Interviewer 15:04
Yeah.

Isha 15:06
But you always question.
I don't know, statistics are hard, isn't it? It's like, who are you? Who are you? Who is your field of, who are your, what's the word? When you're like, there's a group of people that you're like investigating. You're like, yeah, yeah, like who have you chosen for this study? You know, like, is it actually raging there? How bored are the participants? Like,

Interviewer 15:19
Like a discourse.
The participants, yeah.

Isha 15:29
you know, there's always a bit of like, I'll take those statistics with a pinch of salt. But I do think it is really helpful in kind of like visualising how impactful these things are. And
Yeah, I think that there is, I think that for these kind of like, long form like articles, there is a benefit to having that formula because I think that people or brands will read these and, you know, they want to immediate people need that like a big grab, you know, I think that if you're

If you're going to an article for something specific, a lot of the time people do want the fact that they can like intake quickly and reference quickly, you know.

Interviewer 16:16
Yeah. And do you ever, have you had any experiences engaging with articles online? So that might be through commenting or messaging.

Isha 16:18
The.

Interviewer 16:29
Does that ever happen again?

Isha 16:29
And yeah, Substack, I think the Substack's quite like that actually. I think there's quite like a social element to it where...

Interviewer 16:34
Mhm.

Isha 16:39
Yeah, I think they're always like sharing.
Like appraisal, I think that's always quite nice. I'm trying to think about that. I've never actually messaged people about it. I've had, can I talk about people messaging me? I've had a lot of faculty. I have had people message me before, which is really, that is like the best feeling ever.

Interviewer 16:52
Yeah, yeah, definitely.
And what happens, you just have conversations with them or?

Isha 17:01
Yes, well, with my grief articles, those are the ones I get the most messages about because people will often be experiencing something similar and will message me and will say, thank you to like this, found me when I really needed it. Like, thank you so much. And that I think that that is just like the most, the best feeling ever because that's what you want.

Interviewer 17:18
Yeah.

Isha 17:22
From all writing, isn't it? To be, you know, to feel like it's helped someone.

Interviewer 17:27
Yeah, so it's like actually quite a big impact to be able to share that online engagement.

Isha 17:28
That.
Yeah, yeah, that community. I think that when you find community in writing and that feeling when you're reading something and you're like, this has made me feel really like seen or like affirmed and like to know that someone else has like experienced similar things to me. I think that is what it is like, even if you don't know them.
That could be a complete stranger, I think, and that is really, really lovely.

Interviewer 17:51
Mm.

Isha 17:56
And...

Interviewer 17:56
And have you ever had where you've read something or written something online and it's impacted how you behave offline?

Isha 18:01
Yeah.
But, but...
The.
Ohh.

Interviewer 18:07
If that makes sense.
So it could be that you like had a discussion with your dad or maybe you went to an event that you read about online, anything like that.

Isha 18:13
Yeah.
Yes.
Yeah.

But, Ah, OK.
Yeah, to be honest, I think that happens a lot. I think that a lot of the like...
London recommendations I actually find really great. Like when it's like galleries that you should go to or like free events. There's always those like free things to do in London this weekend. Always love those. I'm trying to think of conversations I've had.

Interviewer 18:42
Mhm.

Isha 18:56
Yeah, I think a lot of the time, I'm not like a film buff or anything. Like sometimes when I'll read, like, because there were so many films out over winter, and I got into the habit of going with the same group of friends and we would kind of like watch the film and then talk about it. And then I would read like a film review about it.

Interviewer 19:07
Mm.

Isha 19:16
And then we'd kind of like, this is like kind of like a book club vibe, I guess, but then we'd go back and be like, I read this about this, I read this about this. And those were really interesting because I think that there's so, like Begonia, for example, like people had such strong reactions to it. And I like, when I have a thing when I like read things online, I'm like, oh yeah, I should really agree with that one. And then I read another one and I'm like, oh, I should really agree with that one. Like I'm quite easily swayed with some of the like film reviews because I'm not a film buff myself. So yeah, in that way, yeah, like discussing like other people's opinions offline.

Interviewer 19:45
Yeah.
What, and it was like a you guys would meet to talk about films. It was an actual film club.

Isha 19:56
Yeah.
Yeah.

Interviewer 20:03
This time, OK, yeah, yeah.
Okay, yeah.

Isha 20:10

That opinion, um...
But yeah, did have a book club as well. I had a book club last year. That was good.

Interviewer 20:17
I need to get back into book clubbing. I'm meant to do this. So this section is a bit more about attention.

Isha 20:20
That's great. Yeah.
Right.
Mmh.
But...

Interviewer 20:30
Can you recall like the last few longer form articles that you read and how was your focus? So were you able to finish it in one sitting or do you find that a bit harder?

Isha 20:44
Usually it's U settings, to be honest. I think that because I'm reading them off my phone.

Interviewer 20:46
Mm-hmm.

Isha 20:51
Like, that's harder to concentrate. Usually I'm right with a book, like I don't have to, I can read like loads of chapters in one, but I think the fact that it's on your phone, it's like things will always pop up and then you always get distracted, you know. Usually I can't finish it in one sitting.

Interviewer 21:05
Mm-hmm.
Have you ever noticed when you're maybe reading like more in like a particular period of time, like you said, when you were reading like 3 articles a day or something, I can't remember. Do you have you noticed like the...

Isha 21:09
Yeah.
Yeah, yeah.
Yeah.

Interviewer 21:22
change in your ability to be able to sit and read things depending on how often you're reading articles.

Isha 21:31
And, It's not got worse, I think, but it hasn't changed for a while now. Like my attention span isn't getting any worse, if that makes sense. I think that I was reading more then because I had like a longer commute and I was actually reading less books then. It's kind of which now that I'm reading more books, less like online articles.

Interviewer 21:40
Mmh.
Okay.
Mmh.
The.

Isha 21:53
If that answers the question.

Interviewer 21:55
Yeah, yeah.

Isha 21:56
Yeah.

Interviewer 21:57
And what kind of things you mentioned, like being on your phone, but can you think of other things that influence how much time you spend on an article on your phone? Like it might be the way that it's written or the app that you're using.

Isha 21:57.
Thank you.
Yes, I think that naturally some articles drag on a lot. And like, obviously I understand what they need to do. They need to like properly like contextualize things. But sometimes I read a paragraph and I'm like, you could have said that in two sentences. Like, I remember reading this thing recently. It was

Interviewer 22:26
Yeah.

Isha 22:32
Stephen King on writing. And it was like, if you can say it in less words, say it in less words.

Interviewer 22:38
Mhm.

Isha 22:39
And I do agree with that. I think that, like...
It sounds bad, so obviously that sounds like lack of attention and that you should be able to read a long paragraph. But I do always think that like, it has more impact when you say it in less words.

Interviewer 22:56
It's interesting you say that as well, because that is this whole theory, spoiler alert, but about how we're not meant, like humans weren't naturally meant to read and like our attentions have like, like primitive selves weren't about language and depth. It was about just like,

Isha 22:58
This.
Ohh.
Yeah.

Interviewer 23:14
primal things like getting food and like being able to quickly switch. So the fact that we're breathing is something that we've conditioned ourselves to do. So yeah, I guess when people are saying like you don't need 10,000 words, you can say it in 10, it's kind of true because it's not natural for us to like have to go through all of that.

Isha 23:16
Yeah.
Yes.
It.
Yeah.
Yeah.
Totally. And I think that people always think it sounds better when you're like, you know, building up to something and you're saying it in a really nice, intricate, detailed way. But

actually, it sticks way more when you just say it how it is. And you don't necessarily need to use the biggest word, you just use it.

Interviewer 23:50
Yeah.

Isha 23:54
Most successful one.

Interviewer 23:56
And you say you read a lot of books. Can you explain potentially the feeling of when you're like really like engaged in the book and you're like not letting anything else distract you? Like how does that feel to you and what effects might that have on you?

Isha 23:59
Mm.
Yes.
Yeah.
Best feeling ever. I love that feeling. I think it's like, I think it's the only time where I feel like... that I can escape a little bit without being too cheesy. But I usually actually like explain like what that feeling is like.

Interviewer 24:23
Mhm.
Yeah, and like what meaning it has for you.

Isha 24:34
Um, I think...
Like, I think books have had different meanings for me at different points of my life. But like, when I'm really engrossed in a book, it is usually fiction and it's usually escapist and it's usually like,
something that I can like really like visualize and like they've always like created like a whole nother like world for you to like exist in to you for you to like dip in and out of. And recently I've been reading like trying to read much more serious books. And they're so great like they have they have different value, but it's not quite that same like

Interviewer 25:09
Mm.

Isha 25:15
escapist feeling where I'm like, I can forget about the troubles of the world.

Interviewer 25:21
Yeah.

Isha 25:23
But yeah, hopefully that answers the question. I think, yes, it's amazing when you get like, when you're like, I usually have it when I'm on holiday and like I'm reading it something like for a while, because then you're so invested in it. It's like, all you want to do is read that book.

Interviewer 25:26
That makes sense.
Yeah, that feeling when you're like, I can't have this conversation with you right now 'cause I need to read Skype, like I really...

Isha 25:42
Yeah, literally. It's so good. I love it. It like, it does baffle me that some people don't ever have that.

Interviewer 25:49
Yeah, so weird. So my final two questions are slightly more abstract. So just, there's no like wrong answer. Just let me know how you feel. But more broadly, and not just for yourself, but for the people around you as well, what do you think the value of paying attention to a longer article is?

Isha 25:51
Right, yeah.
Mhm.
I think it has a lot of value. I think that...
I think that having a topic that you're interested in.
enough to read so much about it. I think that that has holds a lot of value in itself, you know, enough that you've like taken the initiative to like build and put it further. I think that
I think there is, yeah, there is something to be said in that having like your attention span, because obviously that it gets harder and harder. And like we have been, we have been tailored to 15 second videos on Instagram, like there's no denying that. But I think that I do sense like a,
a return to that like slowing down of like, I really care about this, so I'm going to nurture it and I'm going to like invest in it. And it's worth, it is worth my attention. Do you know what I mean?

I think that like valuing how, valuing something in terms of like how much time we're willing to give it and

Interviewer 27:14
Mm.
Home.

Isha 27:30
work towards something, I think that that is, that holds a lot of value there.

Interviewer 27:35
Yeah, like you said, working towards something like it can have this kind of positive effects where it might change things.

Isha 27:38
Yeah.
Exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And when you're like chipping away at something and you're kind of like, yeah, I think even like, like dissertations come to mind. It's like when you have chosen this topic that you care about and you, you know, you're wanting to invest so much time in it. I think that there's

Interviewer 27:43
Okay.

Isha 28:00
like long form in that way has such a sense of achievement to it. Because at the end of it, you have this project where you're literally like, well, I've worked on this for months and months and months. And I've read so much around it. Like I've really immersed myself in that discourse. I think that that is

Interviewer 28:04
Who?

Isha 28:18
There's no denying that that is like, there's a lot of value there, rather than just like...
I read one article about this and then put it away forever, you know.

Interviewer 28:28
Yeah, yeah. And do you ever feel like you have a sense of responsibility for the things that you might be writing or reading or sharing, whatever it may be online? And by that,

Interviewer 28:45
It means like, does your engagement with online knowledge have like a bigger effect for other people?

Isha 28:54
I like that question. I, yes, I always like when I would be writing and posting stuff and sharing it, I would always want to write at the beginning, like, this is just my experience. I'm not saying that you guys have to agree with it, but obviously, like, that goes without saying, like, that's just the people pleaser with me. Like, I'm not,
writing these things and putting that there, expecting everyone to be, expecting it to have everyone, you know. And I think, like, again, that's narcissistic to think that like anyone would give a **** if they read something and it doesn't align with their opinions, you know.

Interviewer 29:21
Mhm.

Isha 29:31
Like, I'm writing on a much smaller scale than that, you know, I've got 50 followers, it's like detrimental. But I think that, I think that if you find your community, which is what Substack is actually quite good for, I think that, you know, you don't have to think beyond that.
I don't think that you're going to impress everybody. Yeah, so I think that I do, I do think a lot about like broader impacts of it, but I don't necessarily think you need to on a huge scale. You know, if it if it helps someone, one person, then...

Interviewer 30:05
Yeah.

Isha 30:11
That's kind of enough at this stage.

Interviewer 30:12
And it depends on your audiences as well.

Isha 30:15
Yeah, exactly. But I think, obviously, on a bigger scale, you know, like influences, people who have millions of followers, I think that, you know, that's where it gets much, much harder. And funnily enough, that's when people say less, isn't it? Because they can't impress everybody and they know they can't impress everybody. So
They don't say anything.

Interviewer 30:35
Yeah.

Isha 30:36
Yeah, does that answer the question?

Interviewer 30:37
Awesome.
Yes, it does. It's very useful. Thank you. I don't know if there's anything that springs to mind that we haven't discussed about the topic of sharing information online and like how we engage with it.

Isha 30:41
Is it?
The.

Interviewer 30:57
Well, you feel like we've covered most things that you're aware of.

Isha 31:00
I thought there was.
I don't know where my brain's going to go with this, but I was having a conversation recently with my friend and she was talking about how Substack has made everyone think that they're writers. And I was like, obviously, I'm biased in it because I was like, I do see the value of Substack. But it is that kind of thing where it's like making Substack like an app.

Interviewer 31:12
Mhm.

Isha 31:25
That's almost like...
Instagram in the way that it's like, you know, people sharing their lives. Like, I think that...
there are more, there's more benefits to it than there is harm. But I think that in the sense of like that, like kind of masochistic, like, what I was saying, like, I'm thinking so much about myself. I think that that can sometimes get confused with like, being a writer and it's not harmful in like a massive sense, like, you know, everyone should try out things that they want to.

Interviewer 31:45
Mhm.

Isha 31:55
try out and but I think yeah that there is that thing of like a mass of choice in like apps and like I think that there is something to be said in like
Do you know? Do you know what I mean? It's like...

Interviewer 32:09
I know what you mean. It's the idea that these spaces of knowledge sharing have also just become social media. And like, it's, yeah, yeah. I'm glad you raised that.

Isha 32:11
But...
Yes, that's exactly what I'm trying to say. Yeah, abstract becoming a form of social media is strange, because it's like...
So like, it's never been like that before. It's like, obviously in Twitter, you have threads of information and stuff, but like, I don't know, it's the first app that I've come in contact with at least that's like people delving further into their thoughts, you know. But other than Wattpad, after Wattpad.

Interviewer 32:39
Mm-hmm.
What's Wattpad?

Isha 32:45
Oh my god, I used to read Wattpad all the time. That was like my original, like, source of reading. It was like mostly fanfics.

Interviewer 32:52
Oh, is it where that that something to do with Harry Styles? I was like a whole, yeah.

Isha 32:53
What movie was that?
Yeah, that's about after originated. That would actually value in this research, but that was such an interesting period of time. Like, people were obsessed with it. It was like that was like the zeitgeist thing. But I don't know if it was originally intended for fan fiction or if it was intended to be something like Substack.

Interviewer 33:05
How about?

Isha 33:17
Yeah.

Interviewer 33:19
Yeah, maybe, yeah, like a some kind of blogging like MSN thing.

Isha 33:23
Yeah, maybe it was, and oh my god, but yeah, people went well.

Interviewer 33:26
It's funny.

Isha 33:28
Good time.

Interviewer 33:30
Okay, well, I'm just gonna stop the recording.