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INTERVIEWER: Hello, and welcome to the Student Hub Live. Well, this is our freshers event. This session is all about fake news.

It's called, "can you believe it." And I'm joined by Helen [INAUDIBLE] and Fiona Durham from the library. Welcome to the studio.

For those of you who are just joining us, you're going to see a selection of interactive tools. And that's if you're in the Watch and Engage option of the website. If you aren't there, and you can't see those, you're not going to get to participate.

And we've got some exciting questions coming up throughout the programme that we'd really like to know your thoughts on. So if you're in the Watch Only option, go back to the website, select Watch and Engage, put your student or staff ID in. And then you should go into a different interface where you can see the chat, and also if you vote to tell us where you are, what subject you're studying, at what level, how you're feeling right now, and whether or not you've been to a Student Hub Live event before. That would be very helpful for us to know.

Just select the widget that applies to you, fill in your details. And if it's one where there were three options, it's not going to send unless you put three things in. So if you can't think of three, just put a full stop in, and then your results will submit.

It's also interesting to know that you can change the interface. So you can get the widgets larger or smaller. So if you're really into the chat, you can make that increase in size. And you can do that, I think, through the bottom right hand side, there's an option to change the screen layout. And if the chat's going very fast, you can pin it, as well.

So welcome to the studio, and we're going to talk about fake news. Now, this is a very, very hot topic right now. And I'm pleased that the library are often doing things around these hot topics. And as I was just saying, digital literacy is a very important skill. So the library don't only help with finding things in referencing, but it's this whole other side of things that's important.

SUBJECT 1: Yeah, no that's exactly true. Yeah, so we're going to talk about fake news, but we're also going to introduce how the library can help you combat fake news, essentially. So we've actually got a widget up at the moment. It's a headline that was widely shared.

It's "Do Farmers Feed Cows Skittles?" So we'd like the audience to respond to that.

INTERVIEWER: So you'd like to know whether farmers feed cows Skittles. They might go around and Google this, though. I'm warning you, because they're very digitally literate.

SUBJECT 1: Oh, that's good.

INTERVIEWER: So false or true? OK, so you'll see that widget now appearing in your screen. So do you think it is true or false whether farmers feed cows Skittles?

SUBJECT 1: We tried to pick sort of a light hearted fake news item, because what with the EU referendum and the US election, fake news has become really prominent, as you say. But it's old as the hills, really, fake news. Fabricating stories for political advantage, to make money, or just for entertainment value, like April Fools' Day, I mean it's been going on forever.

But the reason that it has gained prominence is to do with the way that fabricated stories were easily shared on social media during the EU referendum and the US election. Because it's so easy to click on that Retweet or Share button in Twitter and Facebook and not verify the sources. And speaking of Facebook as well, you get these very provocative and sensationalist headlines on the Facebook news section. And that's to do with click bait.

So they want you to visit their site, the authors and the hosts of these news items, because they get paid by advertisers when their traffic goes up. So that's why they come up with these really sensationalist headlines. And when you actually go and read the article, it could either have nothing to do with the headline, or it's just completely made up.

INTERVIEWER: That always happens on Facebook. You'll see something, and then you can't get to it. And then you think, oh, I won't bother with that. But yeah, I get that a lot.

SUBJECT 1: And actually, going back to that digital literacy idea, researchers in Stanford University at the US, they published results of some research they did with middle school, high school, and college age students in the US. And they published that late last year. And they found that these students, who have grown up with the internet, they've never known any different world, so they're digitally savvy, they have trouble verifying the information that they find online.

They trust things that perhaps they shouldn't. So they look at sponsored content on news sites and think that that's the truth. And they have difficulty detecting any bias in any sort of

statements, as well.

So that's why I think, especially for university students like students at the OU, it's very good to develop these digital literacy skills that enable you to evaluate the information that you find online, evaluate those fake news items. So we'll talk about how the library can help. But there are other sources of help out there.

So snopes.com is one that has been around since the mid-90s. They started off debunking viral e-mails. And they now also look at fake news.

The BBC have recently set up a permanent reality check team to try and combat this. And also, you've got things like the NHS behind the news website, which looks at health information and tries and unpicks the headlines. But also, one I listened to very recently was a Radio 4 programme called More or Less. And that's actually a co-production with the Open University.

And that's broadcast on Radio 4. And there's a podcast as well. They're very short. They're about 10 minutes long.

And the most recent one was on how you count the number of people in crowds. And they compared the claims about how many people were in the crowd at Trump's inauguration with the number of women and men who attended the women's march in Washington, DC. And that's a fascinating programme. So there are people out there who are trying to debunk these fake news stories. But yeah, we do want to talk about how the library can help, as well.

INTERVIEWER: But what about this cows feeding Skittles thing? Because what's happened is that it was mainly people saying it was false, and then that has deteriorated and declined. So at last count, I think we're on 67%, and now it's swung back again to 70%. So it's changing as either more people are contributing or perhaps looking online.

SUBJECT 2: I think they're Googling it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you?

SUBJECT 1: If you go to that website I mentioned earlier, snopes.com, you will find an article all about that. And it is actually true. I know, I know.

So farmers, mainly they feed their cattle plant-based things like corn and hay. But they will also occasionally bulk it up with candy, like Skittles.

SUBJECT 2: Apparently, it's because the candy would have been thrown away otherwise, so it's a way of reusing it.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's awful. Poor cows. Who brushes their teeth for them?

These are things we have to think about. OK, so what are some of these ways-- you mentioned students need to evaluate things that they're reading, so that they can make sure that they're accurate and reliable sources. How would you recommend they go about doing that?

SUBJECT 1: OK, well we have some frameworks that they could use. Some checklists, essentially. So, one of those is called PROMPT. It's an acronym, basically. And this is what it stands for.

I don't want to talk about all of them. But the two that I do want to point out are provenance and objectivity. So provenance is essentially, check who produced it, who wrote it. Where is this content coming from?

So if we're talking about fake news, what you might want to do is look at the URL, for example. So there was a site that was mimicking the ABC News site. And the ABC is, I think it stands for American Broadcasting Corporation or company. And they're a major news outlet in the United States.

And there was a fake news site that was mimicking their icon, but putting out fabricated stories. And if you looked at the link address, the URL, it actually ended in .co, which is the country code for Columbia. So that's a clue.

And also, if we're talking about academic articles, look at the author. Maybe follow up and see what their credentials are. And Fiona's going to talk a little bit about academic articles.

So that's provenance. And the other thing is objectivity. So where's the bias?

Is there a bias? And the argument that's being made, is it balanced? And also, do they cite sources?

This links in quite nicely with what Wendy and Catherine were talking about. If they cite their sources, can you follow up on those sources and verify the information? Having said that, I would also say, check your own bias. Because there's something called conformation bias, which leads people to discount information they disagree with and put more weight in

information they agree with.

So maybe think like a history student. You do remember when you were at school and you were given primary sources to analyse and to see where the bias might lay? Try and have those critical goggles on with everything that you look at, essentially.

And then the only other one I want to mention, there's quite a few out there is, WWW. So the who and the why, we've already talked about. That's provenance and objectivity. When is also really interesting, because look at when it was written.

For example, when Trump was elected, there were lots of blogs that were linking to and quoting to a CNN Money article with a headline something like, "Ford Moves Truck Production from Mexico to Ohio." And obviously, these blogs were using that as proof that Trump being president was already having an effect on manufacturing in the United States.

If you looked at the actual article, it was written in August, 2015. And it wasn't exactly saying what the headline would lead you to believe. So that means that there's no causation there. So always think critically about, what's the agenda here?

INTERVIEWER: Exactly, because everything has an agenda. And those frameworks can be really useful. They might be things you see in the module materials, where course teams may say, let's evaluate an article and use some of these, so that students can actually see firsthand what nuances are out of there, and therefore, how reliable that is as a source. But also really applicable if you can just think, ah, let me just think about those things when I'm looking at The Daily Mail, for example.

SUBJECT 2: Yeah, we were going to talk about articles, actually. Because one of the things about the information you found in the library is that it's particularly good quality information. We've chosen it, and academics have chosen it, to be good quality.

And for example, you'll often come across things called peer reviewed articles in the library. And these are articles which have been written by academics who are experts in their field. And they're then submitted to peer review journals, and other academics in the same field will then look at the article and check it for accuracy, quality, and all sorts of things. And it's only then that the article will be published.

And you can find peer reviewed articles in the library. And I've got here the results of a search which I did for something called cold fusion. And you'll see on the left hand side of the results

that there's a box called Show Only, and a link there, which will allow you to just put peer reviewed articles in as the kind of information that you want to find. So this is an easy way to find peer review in the library.

And I want to talk a little bit about being critical, even of the academic information that you find in the library, because you can't always believe what you find. And I've got an article here, which is observation of cold nuclear fusion. And I might just quickly say that fusion is something that happens in the heart of the sun at millions of degrees centigrade and unimaginable pressures.

And two scientists in 1989 called Fleischman and Pons claimed to have made nuclear fusion happen at room temperature in their laboratory. And obviously, there was a lot of excitement about this at the time, because it would have meant endless free energy. And this article supporting them was published in *Nature*, which is one of the most prestigious science journals in the world. And obviously, it's a peer reviewed journal. But the accuracy of the information was very quickly discredited by scientists around the world, because nobody could replicate these results.

INTERVIEWER: I think they were putting cold water in a coffee can.

SUBJECT 1: I don't know if anybody has any other examples of discredited academic information which they'd like to share with us with the chat, because we'd be interested to hear about it. This is just one particular example. And I just want to mention that if you do come across the subject, it's always a good idea to read around it, find different items.

It's very easy, for example, if you were writing about cold fusion, that you would instantly find that that particular article wasn't particularly credible if you wanted to use it in an assignment. And of course, another thing that students very often do is look at Wikipedia. So I've got an article here from Wikipedia, and it's about cold fusion.

And it looks like a really good article. It's excellent. It goes into quite a lot of detail about the controversy. But there are two good reasons for not using Wikipedia in your assignments.

And one of them is the provenance thing. So for example, you don't actually know who's written the Wikipedia article. But if you go into the behind the scenes in Wikipedia to see who's actually doing the editing, they've got names like Bender the Bot, and Delirium 2K, and HeadBomb.

INTERVIEWER: That might be their real names. You don't know.

SUBJECT 2: No, probably not. I think they're probably PhD students in physics in American universities, the Big Bang Theory people. But you don't know that.

INTERVIEWER: This is the thing with Wikipedia. People think it's an encyclopaedia, but it's all generated by anybody. And anybody can add to it, which is one of its strengths, but also, as you say, an issue with provenance.

SUBJECT 2: And then the second reason for not using Wikipedia is that cold fusion is actually, if you'll pardon the pun, a bit of a hot topic. Actually, this page in particular has been vandalised on numerous occasions. And they've had to take the unusual step of locking it for editing, so that not anybody can edit it anymore.

And I think probably it's because there are a few die hard conspiracy theorists out there who think that the oil companies are suppressing it. So that's one of the things to be aware of, certainly with using Wikipedia. And to be aware when you're looking at information, even if it's from a quality source like the library, you should always be critical of it.

INTERVIEWER: And it's good to be able to look around things. Look around topics and find out about them. But ultimately, students are being assessed mainly, particularly at level one, on the module materials, and on the way that those teams are presenting it and demonstrating particular aspects of the topic.

SUBJECT 1: But it is a life skill, I think, to be able to critically evaluate information. Because as we started this session, fake news, it influences elections. And it has a real impact on people's lives. So yeah, so it's-- yeah.

As far as study goes, you will be taught these skills. And you would be expected to put them into practise. But you will also come away from your OU study with important life skills as well, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you so much. Where can students go for help?

SUBJECT 2: We've got Being Digital, which I think Wendy and Catherine.

INTERVIEWER: They talked about it in their excellent referencing session. So if you missed that, do watch that on Catch Up. It outlines everything you need to know about referencing.

SUBJECT 2: There is another pathway in Being Digital. It's made up of several different pathways. And there's a pathway called Trust Online, and it has things like who to trust online, what to trust online. And it also has a section about when and how, and why not to use Wikipedia.

INTERVIEWER: Excellent, that sounds very useful.

SUBJECT 1: And there's also the helpdesk as well, which I think Catherine and Wendy mentioned. But we're always ready and willing to help you with any questions to do with evaluating information.

INTERVIEWER: Wonderful. Well, thank you both very much for filling us in on all of that. And thank you for coming along and updating us on a very topical issue from the library.

OK, we're going to show you a couple of [INAUDIBLE] videos again from the library. And then we're going to come back in five minutes, where we're going to be talking about shopping and the art of bargain hunting. We have Charlotte Webb from the Department of Mathematics, who's going to talk about how to use those skills to make sure that you don't get ripped off in the supermarket. We'll see you back in five.

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