APPENDIX:
EXPLORING HIGH MEDIA LITERACY AMONG CHILDREN AGED 8-12

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DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: HOW DO CHILDREN TALK ABOUT TRUSTWORTHINESS?

Discourse analysis is a method which analyses the language used, and how the words, phrasing and structure of the conversation work together to build a particular message or understanding. The focus is on the words, tone, body language and gestures which are all used to construct a particular version of an event or action. Discourse analysis is inherently interpretative, in that it interprets the language used and makes broader claims on the basis of this. The aim of this discourse analysis is to explore how children themselves talk about the notion of trustworthiness in online contexts. We would not expect that children have a nuanced understanding of what they can and can't trust online, and so knowing the language they use can help in understanding how best to talk to children about what trustworthiness is and how it can be established.

Children used language which indicated that they felt that trustworthiness is a black and white issue.
When asked about knowing what they could trust online, children recognised that there were things that were fake in the online world and that information that was presented as true could actually be false.

*'Some **facts** can be like immediate to know that it's not true, that it's **false**, but some you don't really know.'*

Girl, Search, 8-10 yrs, Wales

Here, the participant recognises that there are things that are presented as facts which are actually not true, and she recognises that it is not always possible to tell. As with a lot of children, she presents true and false information as being clearly distinct, with information being either true or false.

This is also the case for social media, where children construct a dichotomy between accounts that are fake or publish fake information and those that are real or verified. Here, the participant explains what an untrustworthy person may look like on social media.

*'It may look like they are very rich with lots of money, that they're always flexing, but it could just all be **fake** and **rented**.'*
Boy, Social Media, 8-10 yrs, England

The participant recognises that people can present themselves in a certain way on social media, and offers a contrast between someone posting that they may be very rich and boasting about it (flexing), but then demonstrates a knowledge that this could be fake. In this sense, although he demonstrates an understanding of what is and is not trustworthy, this is also presented as being very black and white.

Similarly, children most often talked about trust in information related to whether they got what they called 'the answer'. This relates to the fact that children were often searching for information for things like homework and wanted to know they had got the correct information.

*'It says **the answer** and some of those don't actually say the answer.'*
Girl, Online Gaming, 11-12 yrs, Northern Ireland

*'It depends like whether it just gives me **the answer** straight away'*
Boy, Search, 8-10 yrs, England

In both these examples, the participants want to get 'the answer' to a specific search query. Underlying this is the presumption that there is a correct answer. Their focus in terms of trustworthiness, then, is whether the answer it gives is correct rather than necessarily whether they can trust the website itself.

Children use very definitive language around trustworthiness.
As children understand trustworthiness in terms of whether something is real or fake, this is reflected in the type of language they use when talking about it. There is a lack of qualifying words like 'probably', 'maybe', 'most likely' when children are discussing what and who they can trust in online spaces.

*'[social media platform] **just fake'***
Boy, Online Gaming, 11-12 yrs, Wales

*'Where if you go on [search platform], it doesn't have **any fake** images or they're just **all** real.'*
Boy, Social Media, 11-12 yrs, Northern Ireland

*'Then there's things like [search platform], **which is true'***
Girl, Search, 11-12 yrs, Wales

In all these examples, the language the participants use is very definitive. Any qualifying words which are used only emphasise their perceptions of the black and white nature of trustworthiness. In the first example, using the word 'just' reinforces the view that the entirety of the social media platform's content is fake. In the second example, the use of the words 'any' and 'all' highlight the trust placed in the search platforms. In the final example, the platform being 'true' is not qualified in any way, it is presumed to be so.

Children understand there are people behind material online.
In talking about trustworthiness, the children generally spoke about the people who post information online. In other words, they recognised that there are people behind what is being posted online, and that these people can deliberately post misleading or incorrect information.

*'Cause sometimes **people** on [social media platform] would like, exaggerate like stuff. Like this thing happened even if it didn't.'*
Boy, Online Gaming, 8-10 yrs, Northern Ireland

In this example there is a specific recognition that individuals on the platform may post false information. In this case the participant does mention things being 'exaggerated' but then describes the exaggerated information as being false information. In other words, they return to the dichotomy of information being either true or false. The participant does though recognise that people are posting things on the platform and that they can post false information. In the following example, following a discussion about sourcing information, the participant was asked whether they trust their most used search service or their most used social media service more when they are searching.

*'[search platform] [is more trusted] because [on social media platform] it's **people** making videos but **they** are not always correct'*
Girl, Social Media, 11-12 yrs, England

The participant here recognises that with the social media platforms people are making videos, and is aware that these videos (or the people) do not always post correct information. Implied in this response, though, is the fact that they feel that they can trust results from the search platform, potentially being unaware of where and how the search platform gets its data from.

*'**The people** bring up stuff and then make you believe it'*
Boy, Social Media, 11-12 yrs, Northern Ireland

In this example the boys in the triad are discussing information posted on a social media platform. They also recognise that there are 'people' who are behind posting false information. They seem to suggest an understanding that there may be some motivation behind people posting false information in that they are trying to get others to believe it.

*'If **they've** changed the writing'*
Girl, Search, 8-10 yrs, Wales

Finally, when asked about how to recognise a 'wrong' website, the participant explains that you can tell by if 'they've' changed the writing. She is not specific on who 'they' may be, but recognises that there are individuals who may be behind fake or scam websites.

However, in some cases the website itself is given agency, and there is no indication that there is a sense that there are people behind it. In the example below, the girl is describing an experience of being scammed after having bought an item online.

*'And then afterwards **it** was trying to take more money out of my account.'*
Girl, Search, 11-12 yrs, England

She talks about how the scammers tried to take more money out of her bank account after she purchased a specific item. However, she does not refer to the scammers but rather simply uses 'it', which suggests that it is the platform taking the money not individuals. This may indicate less knowledge about how scams work and the notion that there are people behind them.

Determining trustworthiness is portrayed as being a detailed process.
Children often discussed the processes they undertook to evaluate trustworthiness. In doing so they describe complex processes which involved time and skill to be able to do.

*'If you search up on [a search platform] and it said that person I was just searching for is 61 and then you search up on [a different search platform], he was 61. And then you searched up on a website and it said something like [a] completely different thing, like say it said he was 32. You kind of have to go on different search engines to find when he died so you can work out how old he actually was **before you trust** someone saying how old.'*
Girl, Search, 11-12 yrs, Wales

Here the participant provides a detailed description of how they would check on different platforms for verification of a specific fact. They note how they would check three different platforms to check the accuracy of the information. They also provide a description of additional steps they could take

to check if they get some wildly differing information on one search. They explicitly state that this process needs to be carried out before they trust the information they're given.

'Check different like social media… and then you [start searching] different type of things.' Girl, Social Media, 11-12 yrs, England

Similarly, here the participant is describing what she would do if she found information and was not sure which to trust. She notes trying different social media to the one she initially found the information on, and also looking at different sources via search to check the veracity of information. In explaining how she checks multiple sources of information on different platforms, she demonstrates how the process can be an in-depth and considered one.

*'**If you know how** to slow down the videos or zoom in, **you can study** their videos and check if anything's fake or not.'*
Boy, Social Media, 8-10 yrs, England

Here the participant explains how being able to check for fake information on videos is based on having the skills to be able to manipulate the video content to some degree to be able to check for fake information. They use the term 'study' which suggests an in-depth, forensic look at the videos in order to check for trustworthiness.

In another example, in one of the triads the participants talk about how they trust a particular social media account for football news. In their response they indicate that they have taken the time to check the veracity of the information.

*'**everything, everything** he says, **always** makes it true. He said Messi's gonna win the Ballon d'Or the day before, and then the next night he won the Ballon d'Or.'*
Boy, Online Gaming, 11-12 yrs, Wales

The participant starts by saying how everything this account says is always true. By using this definitive language it suggests that they have checked multiple pieces of information, and by saying 'always' it suggests that this has been done over a period of time. Trustworthiness is, then, earned by this particular account because they have a good track record.

Finally, one participant described a detailed process for how they check that the people they're talking to online are actually their friends.

*'**I do this** test to see if it is them, so when with some people I friended I can chat to just them on the game. It's something you can do and I've done that to them. And then I've asked them because it's all my school friends. When I go to school the next day. Like, what did we chat about just to make sure it was them.'*
Girl, Online Gaming, 8-10 yrs, England

She starts this description by saying 'I do this' which implies that this is a regular test that she would do any time she friended a participant. She then provides a vivid description of how the test works, presenting this as a process she knows well. Trustworthiness in this case is something that can be tested.

Discourse analysis summary

- Children construct trustworthiness as a dichotomy between fake and real, for them there is no nuance. This is consistent with the developmental stage of particularly our younger participants, even those who are highly media literate, but it is important to know that their language is black and white and often quite definitive.
- But when children talk about things being fake online, they generally recognise that there are people behind it with specific motivations, this knowledge perhaps demonstrates their high media literacy.
- Children do provide detail on how they determine trustworthiness of information or people. This ability to provide detailed examples of how they evaluate information is another example of their high media literacy.