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## DOXING: THE SANDY HOOK CASE STUDY

### Abstract

*This article aims to contribute to the doxing problem concerning the interpretation of this phenomenon and the provision of anti-doxing measures. The author argues that doxing is a social practice of searching and disclosing adverse events and party information on the internet and is based on people's original intention of justice to let the public understand the facts and truth. However, doxing can influence online audience behavior and shift the results of public opinion polls. The case study on Sandy Hook aims to illustrate doxing and highlights the value of sifting through the information that people receive from various sources. The research exemplifies the negative consequences of doxing, particularly for the victims, whose children were tragically killed, as conspiracy theorist Alex Jones exacerbated the situation by portraying the Sandy Hook shooting as a hoax. Thus, the author suggests the adoption of cyber liability policies and the implementation of cyber insurance to mitigate the risks of doxing. Such measures can also help protect individuals from the potential harm caused by the destructive practice of unregulated media and internet exposure. It is important because, considering the factors of the case study, the coverage of doxing is also shaped by a multifaceted discourse encompassing identity theft, armed conflicts, political issues, cyber trolling, ethical dilemmas in media practices, public health implications, and even social inequality. This discourse has not only sustained the initial wave in the scope of defamation but also plays a key role in studying the evolution of doxing and shaping its understanding among readers.*

**Keywords:** Infowars, Alex Jones, release of personal data online, Adam Lanza, defamation.

**Statement of the problem.** The phenomenon of doxing<sup>1</sup> — the act of publicly revealing someone's personal information without consent — has become a highly controversial issue in recent years. While doxing itself is not illegal when the information is gathered from publicly available sources, the abundance of personal information readily available online has raised concerns about privacy and security. The practice of doxing, also known as cyber man-hunting, involves the search and public disclosure of adverse events and personal information on the internet. Likewise, social media platforms are reluctant to fully ban practices entirely

dependent on their infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> While cyber man-hunting may have originated with a desire for justice, the legal system should play a role in regulating such behavior, and individuals who engage in doxing should be held accountable for any violations of privacy rights or other unlawful actions. The primary defense against this kind of invasion of privacy claim is 'newsworthiness' or 'public interest'.<sup>3</sup> If information is truly 'newsworthy' or in the 'public's interest' to know, it is not considered an unlawful public disclosure of private and embarrassing facts.<sup>4</sup> However, for individuals who do not wish to be affiliated, doxing

<sup>1</sup> The word *doxing* or *doxxing* refers to the frequently illegal accomplishment of operating internet means to investigate and obtain tete-a-tete identifiable information regarding an entity, a government instrument, a public person, a superstar, a state employee, and case-to-case about a regular person.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Trottier, "Denunciation and Doxing: Towards a Conceptual Model of Digital Vigilantism," *Global Crime* 21, no. 3-4 (2020): 198, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2019.1591952>.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Grabowski and Eric P. Robinson, *Cyber Law and Ethics: Regulation of the Connected World* (Routledge, 2022), 94.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

falls under various state criminal laws that also cover stalking, harassment, and personal threats involving a reconnaissance process aimed at exposing all types of personal information, including personally identifiable information (PII) about individuals.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the victims of doxing are individuals of interest to its perpetrators, whether they like or dislike them.<sup>6</sup> By disclosing victims' personal information perpetrators of doxing encourage others to participate in online harassment. In the worst cases, doxing is used as 'cyber-stalking' and makes someone fearful for their safety or even their life, to the point where they need to go into hiding.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the illusion of anonymity that the internet may offer, users must remain cautious and avoid acting as if they cannot be seen. While it may seem like common sense to avoid sharing personal data online, many individuals still engage in this behavior, ignoring these warnings. It is important to recognize that online privacy is not guaranteed, and others can potentially access any information shared online.

Thus, under the law, doxing is legal in most cases as long as the information gathered and shared is from publicly available sources.<sup>8</sup> Others point out that this simply provides easier access to what is already public information.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it has become easier than ever to expose private lives to the public inadvertently. Likewise, the continual reframing of the story allows the media to highlight different facets of the narrative, typically resulting in fresh content and increased viewer interest.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, scholars Ning et al.<sup>11</sup> refer to some "true story" examples related to doxing under the public interest criterion in China. The first example occurred in 2017 when a Chinese international student mentioned in a graduation speech at a U.S. university: "I will always appreciate free speech and freedom here." However, due to the alleged criticism of China's political environment, some netizens with populist tendencies, driven by 'patriotism' believed this act disrespected China. Thus, expressing gratitude for freedom of

speech and liberties in the United States was perceived as criticism of China's political environment, and media outlets labeled it as discourteous towards the nation. This led to a wave of doxing and online harassment, driven by populist beliefs and patriotism, resulting in the dissemination of the student's personal details to the point of receiving threats. According to the author, the student was ultimately bullied under the pressure of public interest. As a rule, the nature of social media leads courts to determine that online posts are public, even if a user restricts access using a site's control.<sup>12</sup> For example, someone's post on their Instagram account that is restricted to viewing by only their friends could still be interpreted as public by the courts simply because it was posted on social media.<sup>13</sup> As a result, a graduate was forced to apologize and delete the posts on the blog.

The second example from Ning et al.'s research<sup>14</sup> occurred in March 2019 during the Ethiopian Airlines crash, where a Chinese woman and her child lost their lives. However, amidst sorrow and grief, some netizens focused on the woman's supposed wealth, speculating from photos that she lived a 'luxurious' lifestyle. Afterwards, her personal information, including old photos, was instantly shared online with astonishing speed. Instead of responding with compassion and regret, some individuals harboring deep-seated resentment towards the wealthy attacked and slandered the deceased woman, resorting to cruel means to humiliate her beyond recovery. Such a doxing phenomenon is not typical of a healthy social environment, as despite the tragedy and loss of life, some individuals took pleasure in others' misfortune, causing further pain to the woman's grieving family. According to the study, this doxing behavior demonstrates a severe lack of empathy and compassion, which are essential for building a harmonious society.

Hence, doxing represents a model of digital brutality. There is, therefore, utility in distinguishing between a doxing victim's experiences of harm, the harmful events that arise from being doxxed, and the mechanisms and powers that cause these harmful events by analyzing the relationship between technology and harm and how these harms are deeply interconnected.<sup>15</sup> Regardless, such

<sup>5</sup> Shaun Aghili, "Doxing," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Internet*, Vol. 3 (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 2, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473960367>.

<sup>6</sup> Mengtong Chen, Anne Shann Yue Cheung, and Ko Ling Chan, "Doxing: What Adolescents Look for and Their Intentions," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 16, no. 2 (2019): 218, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16020218>.

<sup>7</sup> N. Sinclair, "Doxing," in *Privacy Rights in the Digital Age* (Grey House Publishing, 2019), 169.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Jaclyn Schildkraut and Glenn W. Muschert, "Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools: A Comparison of the Columbine and Sandy Hook Massacres," *Homicide Studies* 18, no. 1 (2014): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767913511458>.

<sup>11</sup> Yi Ning, Wei Shao, Zhengrong Yang, and Esther Tyldesley, *Social Perspective an Intermediate-Advanced Chinese Course*, Vol. 1 (Routledge, 2021), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Grabowski and Robinson, *Cyber Law and Ethics: Regulation of the Connected World*, 94–5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Ning, Shao, Yang, and Tyldesley, *Social Perspective an Intermediate-Advanced Chinese Course*, 88.

<sup>15</sup> Briony Anderson and Mark A. Wood, "Harm Imbrication and Virtualised Violence: Reconceptualising the Harms of Doxxing," *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 11, no. 1 (2022): 205–206, <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcsd.2140>.

a conceptualization of the interwoven harms of doxing has vital implications for legal responses to this phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> Addressing the interwoven first- and second-order harms of doxing, the study suggests that legal responses to doxing should not reduce the behavior to a breach of informational privacy but must also recognize the broader security threats posed to individuals.<sup>17</sup> As such, it's crucial to exercise caution when using digital platforms and to be mindful of the information shared online. This includes being mindful of what we post on social media, who we communicate with, and what personal details we provide when creating accounts or filling out forms.

In essence, while the internet can be a powerful tool, it's important to remember that our online actions can have real-world consequences. By being mindful of our digital footprint and taking steps to protect our privacy, we can better safeguard personal data and reduce the risk of exposing ourselves to harm. If these objectives of 'troll storms' are eliminated, trolls will be less likely to disrupt others both on and off the internet.<sup>18</sup> Thus, doxing has its downsides and is more naturally understood to be a kind of harassment or a form of cyber-trolling. At the same time, it is an investigative method used to acquire intimate or difficult-to-find details about an individual by searching internet pages and compiling, analyzing, and inferring data, often leading to adverse consequences; therefore, it is indispensable to establish the boundaries of privacy and consider the potential harm that may result from such practices, as they must be used with caution and ethical principles.

Hereinafter, doxing, as defined in this study, is a cyber manhunt intended to humiliate, bully, demoralize, or blackmail targets through data breaches, infringements of social norms, unethical behavior, a deceptive or toxic demeanor that may damage the individual's prestige, reputation, or moral and ethical beliefs, or publicly shame them. At the same time, the doxer, doxed individual, or the wider public may not acknowledge doxing as particularly problematic, ominous, contentious, or transgressive. Nevertheless, the ethical evaluation of doxing should be based on its ability to bring the most happiness to the most individuals.

#### **Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.**

Given that the research goal is to explore doxing

<sup>16</sup> Anderson and Wood, "Harm Imbrication and Virtualised Violence: Reconceptualising the Harms of Doxxing," 206.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Yao-Tai Li and Katherine Whitworth, "Data as a Weapon: The Evolution of Hong Kong Protesters' Doxing Strategies," *Social Science Computer Review* 41, no. 5 (2022): 1650–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439322111240>.

through a case study methodology, this article examines the latest research on the Sandy Hook case, which is essential for the study.

On December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza fatally shot his mother before going to Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. There, he killed 20 young students and six staff members before taking his own life. As a result, families of the victims were traumatized<sup>19</sup> both by the event itself and by subsequent doxing.

(1) *Lawsuits facts*. Families of the children murdered in the Sandy Hook massacre sued Alex Jones in 2018 for repeatedly saying that the school shooting, which killed 20 first-graders and six adults in Newtown, Connecticut, was a hoax and falsely claiming the families were actors who fabricated the deaths of their loved ones.<sup>20</sup> The shooting was portrayed on Jones's *Infowars* show as a hoax orchestrated to push for stricter gun control.<sup>21</sup> Over time, Jones eventually acknowledged that the school shooting did occur.<sup>22</sup> Families of some of the school shooting victims sued Jones, Infowars, and others in courts in Texas and Connecticut courts, arguing that they had been subjected to harassment and death threats from his followers.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Under the research of Kimberly Eaton Hoagwood et al.: "Newtown's community service system was broad and included a wide array of different community services—mental health, substance use, medical, social services, schools, faith-based, and safety-focused. It was by most standards adequately staffed, with unusually high levels of advanced degrees and years of tenure in the system. Access was largely decentralized with different entry points for school services, community-based treatment services, and wellness services. Evidence-based practices were offered in more than half (57 %) of the behavioral health agencies, 40 % of medical providers, in the school system, and by the majority of solo providers. Yet services were not individualized, and few personalized or tailored services were available. Surprisingly, only one of the 28 agencies offered bereavement or grief counseling" (Kimberly Eaton Hoagwood et al., "Developing a Sustainable Child and Family Service System after a Community Tragedy: Lessons from Sandy Hook," *Journal of Community Psychology* 45, no. 6 (2017): 761, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21890>).

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Randles, "Sandy Hook Families Close to Resuming Lawsuits Against Infowars' Alex Jones," *The Wall Street Journal. Eastern Edition* (2022).

<sup>21</sup> According to Carol Brydolf, "A number of local governing boards throughout the state have also moved quickly: Gait Elementary School District in Sacramento County, for example, has offered voluntary firearms safety training for school staff; trustees in San Luis Obispo County's Coast Unified School District have approved new mandatory classroom locks, lock-down protocols, and 'active shooter in-service classes' (Carol Brydolf, "Preparing for the Unthinkable: School Safety after Sandy Hook," *The Education Digest* 79(3) (2013): 6). Eventually, the case devises oath to reinstate and heighten forthcoming, bans on weapons and shot sells; background tabs for every firearm sale; fortify the National Instant Criminal Background Check System in the US; and brace the nation's cognitive health upkeep and violence-prevention approaches.

<sup>22</sup> D. Colli, "Judge Rules Against Alex Jones in Sandy Hook 'Hoax' Cases," *Globe and Mail*, 2021, A27.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

(2) *Bankruptcy proceeding*. According to J. Randles' investigation materials,<sup>24</sup> families of the Sandy Hook shooting victims are nearing an agreement to resume their defamation lawsuits against conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and his Infowars site following a delay caused by its bankruptcy filing. As stated in the above-cited work, the families have sought various ways to resume the litigation against Jones, arguing that the Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceeding should be dismissed. Ryan Chapple, a lawyer representing the families suing Jones in Connecticut, stated that they believe the bankruptcy proceedings are illegitimate. Chris Mattei, another attorney representing the Sandy Hook families in Connecticut, called the bankruptcy "a sham ... orchestrated by Mr. Jones to delay accountability before a jury."<sup>25</sup> "They've decided that they don't want to participate in these Chapter 11 cases," Infowars' lawyer Kyung Lee said during a court hearing.<sup>26</sup> "We're fine with that, and we just want to make sure that's documented and that it's accurately described in detail so that they're no longer creditors", Lee added, noting that he had been attempting for the last two weeks to reach an agreement with the families, saying there is "a lot of distrust and we're trying to bridge that gap."<sup>27</sup> The families chose to drop from their lawsuits against the Infowars entities that filed for Chapter 11, he said, citing the time commitment and financial burden of continuing the fight.<sup>28</sup> Neither Jones nor his company, Free Speech Systems, has filed for bankruptcy protection despite being *defendants* in the defamation suits. Lee stated that the bankruptcy case would continue because it involves other creditors that have "nothing to do" with Sandy Hook.<sup>29</sup> The bankruptcy proceedings will differ from when it was filed in April, he said but it is expected to move toward a reorganization plan for the Infowars properties under Chapter 11.<sup>30</sup>

As cited earlier in J. Randles' contribution to the case, the investigation materials indicate that Judge Lopez has scheduled a May 27 hearing to consider the families' request to dismiss Infowars' Chapter 11 case. However, the Chapter 11 filing temporarily halted the Texas and Connecticut lawsuits. Jones was held liable by default in September and November by Texas and Connecticut courts, respectively, as penalties for failing to comply with court-ordered discovery requests for documents and information.

<sup>24</sup> Randles, "Sandy Hook Families Close to Resuming Lawsuits Against Infowars' Alex Jones."

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

(3) *Claimants*. The writer D. Colli, previously cited, found that one of the Texas lawsuits was filed by Leonard Pozner and Veronique De La Rosa, whose son Noah was killed in the shooting, while two others were filed by Neil Heslin and Scarlett Lewis, whose son Jesse was killed. Several other families of the victims are also suing in Connecticut on similar claims. An attorney for the parents of 6-year-old Jesse Lewis stated in an opening argument that Jones, a webcast host, led a "vile campaign of defamation" by spreading the false claim that the massacre of 20 children and six staff members at a Connecticut school was staged.<sup>31</sup> "Mr. Jones was continually churning out the idea that Sandy Hook was fake," Mark Bankston told jurors, saying Jones was "patient zero" for the hoax theory.<sup>32</sup>

Bill Ogden, a Houston lawyer representing four parents in the Texas cases, said Jones and Infowars had failed to turn over documents for the past few years.<sup>33</sup> "My clients have and continue to endure Defendants' 5-year campaign of repulsive lies," Ogden said in a statement, quoting the judge's ruling.<sup>34</sup> "We believe the Court hit this nail on the head when it considered Alex Jones' and Infowars' bad faith approach to this litigation," Ogden said citing Jones' public threats and his professed belief that these proceedings were "show trials".<sup>35</sup> The families' lawyers have accused Jones, who did not file for personal bankruptcy, of placing certain media assets in Chapter 11 to avoid being held accountable for falsely claiming that the 2012 school shooting was a hoax.<sup>36</sup>

Heslin and Lewis, the parents of 6-year-old Jesse Lewis, sued Jones and his media company, Free Speech Systems, over the harassment and threats they have faced for years because of Jones' claims on his Infowars website.<sup>37</sup> The father of a 6-year-old victim of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting testified on Tuesday that conspiracy theorist Alex Jones had made his life a "living hell" by pushing false claims that the murders were a hoax.<sup>38</sup> In over an hour of emotional testimony, during which he often fought back tears, Neil Heslin said he had endured online abuse, anonymous phone calls, and harassment in public.<sup>39</sup> "What was said

<sup>31</sup> J. Vertuno, "Alex Jones: Sandy Hook was '100% real'," *USA Today* (Arlington, Va.), 2022, 06.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Colli, "Judge Rules Against Alex Jones in Sandy Hook 'Hoax' Cases."

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Randles, "Sandy Hook Families Close to Resuming Lawsuits Against Infowars' Alex Jones."

<sup>37</sup> "Sandy Hook Dad Says Alex Jones Made His Life a 'Living Hell': TEXAS," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (2001), 2022, A10.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

about me and Sandy Hook itself resonates around the world,” Heslin said. “As time went on, I truly realized how dangerous it was. ... My life has been threatened. I fear for my life, I fear for my safety.”<sup>40</sup> Heslin said his home and car had been shot at, and his attorneys stated on Monday that the family had an “encounter” in Austin since the trial began and has been in isolation under security.<sup>41</sup>

(4) *Defendants*. A lawyer for Jones acknowledged during his opening statement that Infowars had spread false information and said Jones lost millions of viewers after being de-platformed on social media in 2018 because of it. As stated in the above-mentioned work by J. Vertuno, “He regrets what he did, and he’s paying a price for it,” Federico Andino Reynal said. Jones and his lawyer in Connecticut, Norman Pattis, criticized the Texas judge’s ruling in a statement on the Infowars website.<sup>42</sup> “It takes no account of the tens of thousands of documents produced by the defendants, the hours spent sitting for depositions, and the various sworn statements filed in these cases,” they said. “We are distressed by what we regard as a blatant abuse of discretion by the trial court. We are determined to see that these cases are heard on their merits.”<sup>43</sup> Jones’s lawyers have denied the defamation allegations and argued his comments about the school shooting were protected by free-speech rights.<sup>44</sup> His lawyers have denied the bankruptcy was filed in bad faith and said that Chapter 11 was the appropriate forum for settling the families’ legal claims.<sup>45</sup>

Jones’ lead attorney, Andino Reynal, winked at his co-counsel before leaving the courtroom. He declined to comment on the verdict.<sup>46</sup> In a video posted on his website Thursday night, Jones called the reduced award “a major victory.”<sup>47</sup> “I admitted I was wrong. I admitted it was a mistake. I admitted that I followed disinformation but not on purpose. I apologized to the families. And the jury understood that. What I did to those families was wrong. But I didn’t do it on purpose,” he said; the award was “more money than my company and I personally have, but we are going to work on trying to make restitution on that,” Jones said.<sup>48</sup>

(5) *Court*. On Thursday, a Texas jury ordered conspiracy theorist Alex Jones to pay more than US \$4 million — significantly less than the US \$150 million being sought — in compensatory damages to the parents of a six-year-old boy killed in the Sandy Hook massacre, marking the first time the Infowars host has been held financially liable for repeatedly claiming the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history was a hoax. The parents had sought at least US \$150 million in compensation for defamation and intentional infliction of emotional distress, but Jones’ attorney asked the jury to limit damages to US \$8 — one dollar for each of the compensation charges they are considering — and Jones himself said any award over US \$2 million “would sink us.”<sup>49</sup>

A Connecticut judge has ruled against him in a similar lawsuit brought by other victims’ families and an FBI agent who worked on the case.<sup>50</sup> He has also been involved in another trial in Austin.

Judge Maya Guerra Gamble admonished Jones for not being truthful during his testimony there when he said he was bankrupt and had complied with plaintiffs’ requests for information before the trial. “It seems absurd to instruct you again that you must tell the truth while you testify,” she said, “Yet here I am.”<sup>51</sup> A Texas judge has found Infowars host and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones liable for damages in three defamation lawsuits brought by the parents of two children killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre over his claims that the shooting was a hoax.<sup>52</sup> Judge Maya Guerra Gamble in Austin, home of Infowars, entered default judgments against Jones, Infowars, and other defendants for what she called their “flagrant bad faith and callous disregard” of court orders to turn over documents to the parents’ lawyers. Justice Guerra Gamble said in her rulings that she was defaulting Jones and the other defendants after an “escalating series of admonishments by judges, monetary fines and other actions was ineffective in getting the defendants to turn over documents.”<sup>53</sup> The rulings were issued on Monday and released on Thursday.<sup>54</sup>

In 2019, Jones was ordered by another Texas judge to pay US \$100,000 in legal fees to Heslin’s lawyers for disregarding a court order to produce witnesses.<sup>55</sup> Jones was also sanctioned in the Connecticut cases for violating numerous orders to turn over documents and for an angry outburst on

<sup>40</sup> “Sandy Hook Dad Says Alex Jones Made His Life a ‘Living Hell’: TEXAS.”

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Colli, “Judge Rules Against Alex Jones in Sandy Hook ‘Hoax’ Cases.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Randles, “Sandy Hook Families Close to Resuming Lawsuits Against Infowars’ Alex Jones.”

<sup>46</sup> “Alex Jones Ordered to Pay Sandy Hook Parents More than \$4M; First Time Infowars Host Held Financially Accountable for Lies,” *Toronto Star*, 2022, A12.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Vertuno, “Alex Jones: Sandy Hook was ‘100% real’.”

<sup>52</sup> Colli, “Judge Rules Against Alex Jones in Sandy Hook ‘Hoax’ Cases.”

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

his web show against an attorney for some of the victims' relatives.<sup>56</sup> A judge barred Jones from filing a motion to dismiss the case — a ruling that was upheld after being appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which declined to hear his appeal in April.<sup>57</sup>

The total amount awarded in this case could serve as a precedent for the other lawsuits against Jones and underline the financial threat he's facing.<sup>58</sup> It also raises new questions about the ability of Infowars — which has been banned from YouTube, Spotify, and Twitter for hate speech — to continue operating, although the company's finances remain unclear.<sup>59</sup>

**Problem Assessment.** In the digital age, our private lives are increasingly vulnerable to public exposure. Perhaps, most harmful is the permanence of information published on the internet.<sup>60</sup> As is often the case when a debate intensifies, extreme voices dominate the conversation. This demonstrates journalists' use of frame-changing to tell the story, which can potentially impact how the audience makes sense of the event.<sup>61</sup> School shootings often provoke heightened emotional turmoil, as they are intentional mass casualty events targeting some of society's most vulnerable members — students.<sup>62</sup> Hooks' systemic framework helps understand how mass school shootings can occur in a democratic society where citizens are simultaneously rendered powerless to respond effectively with policy and legislation.<sup>63</sup> For instance, when the Sandy Hook shooting occurred, initial media reports incorrectly identify the shooter as Ryan Lanza, Adam Lanza's brother.<sup>64</sup> Many media organizations rushed to locate Ryan Lanza's Facebook account and published his photo along with other personal information.<sup>65</sup> His picture was widely circulated on news screens and media web pages, and within five hours, his Facebook

photo had been shared nearly 10,000 times.<sup>66</sup> Since the Sandy Hook shooter committed suicide, anger could not be alleviated by the expectation of justice through the legal system.<sup>67</sup> Conspiracy theorists verbally and psychologically attacked participants of the tragedy and engaged in theft and property destruction. Accordingly, Alex Jones is widely recognized as a conspiracy theorist, known for his controversial rants — including the claim that the increase in the number of gay people is due to a government-run chemical warfare operation.<sup>68</sup> In 1999, he created Infowars, a far-right, conspiracy-driven website featuring his radio show, rants, and controversial theories. One of his most infamous claims on the website is that the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting — which resulted in multiple deaths — was a hoax. As a result, some victims were publicly accosted and received hate emails, and phone calls or letters denying the deaths of their loved ones.<sup>69</sup> Those threats were both terrifying and retraumatizing, leading some participants to consider the “truthers” dangerous. This intensified the participants' trauma and anger, forcing them to disconnect phone lines, change numbers, and hide from an intrusive media that seemed solely interested in headlines: “We go out of our back door, and we walk around to the front, and we just get hit with this wall of photographers... And they were taking pictures, and we were trying to move past them, and it was just so invading.”<sup>70</sup> “My experience of living as a free person in America is gone. I do not live as a free person in America. I am a tragic public figure.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Diana Soliwon and Steven Nelson, “Was an Innocent Person Wrongly Identified as Ryan Lanza Responsible for the Connecticut Elementary School Shooting?,” *U.S. News & World Report*, 2012, December 14, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2012/12/14/was-an-innocent-person-wrongly-identified-as-ryan-lanza-responsible-for-connecticut-elementary-school-shooting>.

<sup>67</sup> Craig Rood, ““Our Tears Are Not Enough”: The Warrant of the Dead in the Rhetoric of Gun Control,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 1 (2018): 51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2017.1401223>.

<sup>68</sup> Beth Shilliday, “Alex Jones: 5 Things to Know about Man Ordered to Pay Sandy Hook Parents More than \$45M,” *Hollywood Life*, 2022, <http://ezproxy.its.uu.se/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/alex-jones-5-things-know-about-man-ordered-pay/docview/2698976717/se-2>. Also, according to the mentioned work of Shilliday, in 2020, Alex Jones made headlines for going on a tirade about food supply shortages during the coronavirus pandemic and claiming to eat his neighbors to feed his family. Alex is banned on virtually all social media platforms; Alex has proven to be anti-LGBTQ; Alex has claimed that former First Lady Michelle Obama is a ‘man’.

<sup>69</sup> Note individuals or parties occasionally abuse the internet to spread false announcements or encounter cyber trolling. It is expected to strong-arm someone and make them feel vulnerable. In such matters, the legal system ought to moderate and hold those accountable for their moves.

<sup>70</sup> Joanne Cacciatore and Sarah F. Kurker, “Primary Victims of the Sandy Hook Murders: ‘I Usually Cry When I Say 26’,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 116 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105165>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Colli, “Judge Rules Against Alex Jones in Sandy Hook ‘Hoax’ Cases.”

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> “Alex Jones Ordered to Pay Sandy Hook Parents More than \$4M,” *Toronto Star*, 2022.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Colin J. A. Oldberg, “Organizational Doxing: Disaster on the Doorstep,” *Colorado Technology Law Journal* 15, no. 1 (2016): 198.

<sup>61</sup> Schildkraut and Muschert, “Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools,” 34.

<sup>62</sup> Kevin Wombacher, Emina Herovic, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Matthew W. Seeger, “The Complexities of Place in Crisis Renewal Discourse: A Case Study of the Sandy Hook Elementary School Shooting,” *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 26, no. 1 (2018): 168, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12186>.

<sup>63</sup> Kirsten T. Edwards and T. Elon Dancy, “Learning with Sandy Hook: Mass Violence in Educational Settings—An Editorial Commentary,” *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 10, no. 2 (2013): 107, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2013.849624>.

<sup>64</sup> The research notes that not all shifting is done with trustful rationales is consequential.

<sup>65</sup> Dan Berkowitz and Zhengjia Michelle Liu, “Media Errors and the ‘Nutty Professor’: Riding the Journalistic Boundaries of the Sandy Hook Shootings,” *Journalism (London, England)* 17, no. 2 (2016): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884914552266>.

Research has shown, that the media coverage of Sandy Hook focused more on the victims than the shooter, with very little information about Adam Lanza or the investigation released, particularly in the first week of coverage.<sup>72</sup> This shift in focus from the shooter to the victims aligns with the concept of the ‘worthy victim’,<sup>73</sup> where individuals deemed most newsworthy receive increased media attention. However, advancements in technology have accelerated media content production, often bypassing traditional gatekeepers to disseminate information more rapidly. As a result, the media camped outside families’ homes, accosted them publicly, and displayed a blatant disregard for their tragedy. They even engaged in predatory behaviors, such as paying neighbors for photos and using Freedom of Information Act (U.S.) requests to obtain crime scene images.<sup>74</sup> There is more than mere hypocrisy or political strategy at play here. As personal as they may be, tragedies like terrorist attacks or mass shootings are also experienced as collective traumas, often necessitating joint action for meaningful change.<sup>75</sup> These issues contribute to various societal problems, including violent crime. They are often intangible, offering no clear “bogeyman” in the parlance of moral panic theory, making them particularly difficult to address.<sup>76</sup> During the trial, Jones admitted that it was “absolutely irresponsible” to recklessly claim that the school shooting had been staged to promote stricter gun control measures.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> As strength be foreseen, when a paucity of official reports narrows media news, this occasionally rules to true-to-life errors that appear originally trustworthy but finally are discovered to be untrue as more facts surface. This can clarify the descent in extent on the next days of the event since the public requested straight information about the shooting, but journalists gathered the initial details and pieced together the story through personal details of victims, shooters, etc. participants.

<sup>73</sup> Note this study, therefore, considers that highly publicized school shootings may not have a meaningful effect on people’s perceptions of safety or senses of fear otherwise.

<sup>74</sup> Schildkraut and Muschert, “Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools,” 36.

<sup>75</sup> Christopher M. Duerringer, “Dis-Honoring the Dead: Negotiating Decorum in the Shadow of Sandy Hook,” *Western Journal of Communication* 80, no. 1 (2016): 94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2015.1116712>.

<sup>76</sup> Malte Elson and Christopher J. Ferguson, “Gun Violence and Media Effects: Challenges for Science and Public Policy,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 203, no. 5 (2013): 323, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.113.128652>.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Also, in contrast, based on the work of Michelle Salazar Pérez: “When protectionist viewpoints of children are problematized, however, they compel us to look beyond hegemonic reasoning that suggests teachers need guns to defend schools and interrogate underlying neo-conservative agendas promoted by the right-wing, religious doctrines, and organizations like the National Rifle Association (NRA). Objectifying children as commodities in need of protection mirrors the perspective of many politicians and neoliberal childhood advocacy groups who view younger human beings as either monetary assets or hindrances to our economy. Although perspectives critical of the NRA were minimal, one other article ran a story that questioned the motives of retailers and manufacturers using the tragedy at Sandy Hook to increase gun

Thus, framing people as the problem alters the terrain of the critical discussion in two ways: first, it shifts the focus from guns to individuals.<sup>78</sup> If ‘they’ are the problem, then gun regulation would not resolve the issue.<sup>79</sup> Second, the use of ‘they’ establishes acceptable expertise in the critical discussion. If ‘they’ are part of the problem, then ‘we’ must not trust their reasoning.<sup>80</sup> The faces and names of the Sandy Hook Elementary victims are immortalized and forever etched into the American consciousness.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the number of individuals who would need to be monitored to avoid another Sandy Hook would easily overload any joint mental health and law enforcement effort.<sup>82</sup>

According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press of 2012, Sandy Hook was the second most closely followed story of the year, falling only a few percentage points behind the 2012 Presidential election.<sup>83</sup> The case study examines whether the use of social media in reporting remains a matter of professional ethics or whether it primarily serves as a tool for maintaining the news media’s authority.<sup>84</sup> Some parties viewed the media as a double-edged sword — potentially useful for advocacy efforts, yet often contentious. Against this backdrop, incidents like Sandy Hook are framed as uniquely tragic, prompting heightened public interest, empathy, and investment.<sup>85</sup> To that extent, attempts to deny that these crime victims ever lived are clearly as excruciatingly painful as they are bizarre.<sup>86</sup>

Harms that once might have faded with memory are now permanently enshrined in the digital world.<sup>87</sup> To mitigate the risks of doxing, it is crucial

sales” (Michelle Salazar Pérez, “God Bless Texas. God Bless the NRA: Problematizing Texas Teachers as Armed Protectors in the Aftermath of Sandy Hook,” *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 2 (2017): 142–6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616664232>).

<sup>78</sup> Justin Eckstein and Sarah T. Partlow Lefevre, “Since Sandy Hook: Strategic Maneuvering in the Gun Control Debate,” *Western Journal of Communication* 81, no. 2 (2017): 235, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2016.1244703>.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Cassandra Chaney and Ray V. Robertson, “Media Reporting of the ‘Sandy Hook Elementary School Angels,’” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 6, no. 5 (2013): 103, <https://www.jpnafrican.org/docs/vol6no5/6.5-Chaney.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> Patrick W. Corrigan, “Understanding Breivik and Sandy Hook: Sin and Sickness?,” *World Psychiatry* 12, no. 2 (2013): 174–5, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20041>.

<sup>83</sup> Schildkraut and Muschert, “Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools,” 36.

<sup>84</sup> Berkowitz and Liu, “Media Errors and the ‘Nutty Professor,’” 161.

<sup>85</sup> Marc Lamont Hill, “‘This Shouldn’t Happen Here’: Sandy Hook, Race, and the Pedagogy of Normalcy,” *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 10, no. 2 (2013): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2013.849625>.

<sup>86</sup> J. Zangari, “Sandy Hook: An American Tragedy and the Battle for the Truth,” *Criminal Justice* 37, no. 4 (2023): 38–9.

<sup>87</sup> Oldberg, “Organizational Doxing: Disaster on the Doorstep,” 198.

to exercise caution and apply common sense. Mass shootings — especially those involving children in schools — generate intense media coverage, as audiences seek not only factual details but also a deeper understanding of the social implications of such tragedies.<sup>88</sup> The timeline for the Sandy Hook shooting was impacted by misinformation initially provided by the police. Because officials gave journalists incorrect details — such as the shooter's identity and the number of fatalities — only to later retract them, broadcasters in the second phase were forced of coverage had to prioritize information gathering and fact-checking far more than they would in a typical crisis coverage.<sup>89</sup> When breaking news unfolds, media outlets often rush to report information to the public. However, in their haste, accuracy can sometimes be compromise in the pursuit of being first. In addition, journalists experienced in covering school shootings sought expert opinions on gun control and mental illness much earlier than expected — starting in the first stage of coverage during Sandy Hook rather than the third, as Graber had predicted.<sup>90</sup> Regardless, journalists soon corrected early inaccuracies and became more mindful of verifying facts before shaping the narrative.

Thus, four main consequences of doxing emerged from the qualitative data: 1) biopsychosocial effects, 2) coping and support, 3) community and systems responses, and 4) actions.<sup>91</sup> The initial lack of information released by the police and medical examiner after the Sandy Hook shooting, coupled with increased fact-checking, likely contributed to the reduction of information shared in the media. An ultra-conservative radio show host and prominent conspiracy theorist, Alex Jones, was ordered to pay over US \$45 million in punitive damages to the parents of a 6-year-old boy murdered in the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting. This ruling followed an earlier award of US \$4.1 million in compensatory damages to the same parents.<sup>92</sup> This outcome reflects society's ongoing struggles with value conflicts. The discourse — and at times discord — following school massacres underscores deeply embedded social tensions that often surface in public debate.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Schildkraut and Muschert, "Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools," 36.

<sup>89</sup> Danielle Deavours, "Written All Over Their Faces: Neutrality and Nonverbal Expression in Sandy Hook Coverage," *Electronic News (Mahwah, N.J.)* 14, no. 3 (2020): 136, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1931243120954855>.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Cacciatore and Kurker, "Primary Victims of the Sandy Hook Murders: 'I Usually Cry When I Say 26'," 2.

<sup>92</sup> Corrigan, "Understanding Breivik and Sandy Hook: Sin and Sickness?"

<sup>93</sup> Schildkraut and Muschert, "Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools," 36.

Ultimately, research suggests the problem is an occurrence involving significant doom in intention once associated with an environment. Societies or neighbourhoods must redefine their relationship with affected areas, particularly in cases involving doxing. If a building is destroyed, does its meaning disappear as well?<sup>94</sup> When a structure is removed from a place, the location makes new rhetorical meaning easier to demonstrate.<sup>95</sup> This explains why crises that involve physical destruction are often more conducive to discussions of renewal and rebuilding.<sup>96</sup> Transforming the connotation of an extant area left standing behind a predicament that may demand multiple reconstructions of sense over a longer duration to be adequate. This suggests that policymakers should consider timing carefully. While a societal event may spark interest in a topic, ironically, it may not be the ideal moment to discuss significant policy changes.<sup>97</sup>

The words we use to describe people, actions, and views not only shape our perceptions but also reinforce in-group and out-group frontiers. Along with the address itself, we bear the media through which these pictures cross. In the past, media agencies used gatekeepers to fact-check information and determine the most critical details. Today, an effective way to combat doxing is through continuous awareness training and education campaigns. A comprehensive approach to preventing doxing can be integrated into an organization's overall information systems risk management program. Without such safeguards, media errors will likely persist and escalate, further eroding public trust in journalism and its cultural authority.<sup>98</sup> Organizations may also designate a media relations team to manage their public exposure and establish clear policies on the types of work-related information that can be shared online. Human resource professionals should assess the digital footprints of prospective applicants, particularly for supervisory and executive roles. On the other hand, preventing and punishing doxing may involve substantial revisions to existing data privacy laws; however, such amendments could update these laws to match modern technology and its use.<sup>99</sup> Not only would the amendments improve privacy on the

<sup>94</sup> Wombacher, Herovic, Sellnow, and Seeger, "The complexities of place in crisis renewal discourse," 167.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Nir Menachemi, Saurabh Rahurkar, and Mandar Rahurkar, "Using Web-Based Search Data to Study the Public's Reactions to Societal Events: The Case of the Sandy Hook Shooting," *JMIR Public Health and Surveillance* 3, no. 1 (2017): 8, <https://doi.org/10.2196/publichealth.6033>.

<sup>98</sup> Berkowitz and Liu, "Media Errors and the 'Nutty Professor,'" 163.

<sup>99</sup> Lisa B. Li, "Data Privacy in the Cyber Age: Recommendations for Regulating Doxing and Swatting," *Federal Communications Law Journal* 70, no. 3 (2018): 327.



internet, but they might also address cybersecurity concerns.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, the remedy for the consequences of doxing is cyber liability coverage, which would help in three ways:

1. Loss or damage of data: covers costs incurred due to lost, stolen, corrupted, or damaged data, including compensation claims, fines, investigations, remediation, or recovery costs.

2. Cyber extortion: protects against threats from hackers or ‘hacktivists’ who may disrupt your business by introducing viruses or shutting down your website unless you pay them. This also includes threats to inject defamatory material into your online presence or release confidential information.

3. Command and control: provides specialized knowledge to manage the incident and minimize disruption to the business. This covers costs associated with external PR agencies, communication with customers, clients, suppliers, regulators, and Credit Protection Services for affected parties.<sup>101</sup>

Another effective anti-doxing measure is insurance — the way forward to protect against being doxxed. As people increasingly rely on cyberspace to provide services, organizations must understand their exposure to cyber risks and consider insurance as a control mechanism to protect against losses. There are two types of cyber liability insurance policies: first-party and third-party liability insurance. The first-party insurance impacts the business’s ability to operate, while third-party insurance may damage the reputation and brand of all parties involved.

1. First-party insurance: protects the insured organization’s assets, such as data breaches involving their information and services, business interruption due to network or system failure, theft of digital assets, cyber extortion, and reputational damage.

2. Third-party liability: protects against cyber risks that put customer or partner information at risk, such as a website hack exposing customer credit card details or an IT Cloud provider experiencing an outage resulting in loss of client information. This coverage also includes indemnification against losses from investigations, defence costs, fines, and compensation for affected customers.<sup>102</sup>

Cyber operations do not affect target audiences in a vacuum but are subject to local conditions that filter their reception and mediate their efficacy.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Li, “Data Privacy in the Cyber Age.”

<sup>101</sup> Babak Akhgar, Francesca M. Bosco, Steve Elliot, Priya Kumaraguruparan, Benjamin Rearick, Mark Rogers, and Andrew Staniforth, *Cyber Crime and Cyber Terrorism Investigator’s Handbook* (Elsevier, 2014), 228.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 223–4.

<sup>103</sup> Isabella Hansen and Darren J. Lim, “Doxing Democracy: Influencing Elections Via Cyber Voter Interference,” *Contemporary Politics* 25, no. 2 (2019): 151, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2018.1493629>.

Therefore, strategies must be in place that individuals and organizations can use to mitigate the risk of doxing attacks. Moreover, in the view of the study, doxing is often used to cause personal and emotional damage rather than targeting high-security information. Data breaches often lead to doxing attacks, where personal information is exposed to the public. Such attacks are frequently complemented by hacking into databases for information that is not readily available on the internet. Organizations face challenges in controlling posts on personal social media, blogs, and chat platforms. Individuals often post information online without considering the potential impact on their privacy and security. Some may post to brag, critique, or seek approval from their online connections or the broader internet community. These types of posts often provide the most useful material for doxing attacks. In many instances, attackers begin with low-hanging fruit — easily accessible information found online — which serves as foundational research or reconnaissance for the attack.

**Research Results.** Doxing carries the invariant markers of public disillusionment, nervousness, and textures of betrayal. The limited information released about the Sandy Hook shooting in the initial media coverage can be attributed to both the restricted flow of information by the police and violent media examiners<sup>104</sup> and the increased scrutiny of facts. Traditionally, media agencies relied on gatekeepers to verify information and prioritize the most critical details. The study has shown that public disclosures of the past were more easily forgotten, such as a newspaper article whose audience was limited to a geographic region on a specific day, and required tedious sifting through library records.<sup>105</sup> With the advancement of technology, media production now demands a quicker and more immediate response, often necessitating bypassing gatekeepers to disseminate information.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>104</sup> It is suggested in the work of Elson and Ferguson: “If we are concerned about aggressive behaviour or violent crimes precipitated by violent media, we should consider discontinuing investigations of media uses and effects in samples mostly consisting of college students. Studying media-use patterns of offenders and those who have committed acts of violence against people or property instead could potentially yield highly interesting insights to our understanding of how and when violent media pose a risk” (Elson and Ferguson, “Gun violence and media effects: challenges for science and public policy,” 323).

<sup>105</sup> Oldberg, “Organizational Doxing: Disaster on the Doorstep,” 198.

<sup>106</sup> Thus, as appointed Brett Lunceford: “Becoming a loving resistance fighter requires a kind of informed skepticism; one must critically assess the information that is given to us and how it is disseminated. Becoming a loving resistance fighter requires that one become aware and vigilant, which brings us back to the crap detectors mentioned at the beginning of this talk” (Brett Lunceford, “Crap Detection and the Continuing Need for Media Ecology,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 75, no. 1-2 (2018): 99–100).

Therefore, to support responsible behavior on the internet and advocate for internet governance, the study offers a classification of doxing-related issues in the Sandy Hook scenario, where the quality of doxing coverage is uneven, with significant gaps and unresolved concerns:

(a) *Identity theft*

According to the research done, on the first day of the Sandy Hook shooting, the news mistakenly said that Ryan Lanza, Adam Lanza's brother, was the perpetrator. They showed Ryan's picture on TV and online, and lots of people shared it on Facebook. However, within five hours, the error was corrected. Journalists then started being more careful about verifying information before reporting it. That's why there was less news about it on the second day. One key takeaway from the commentary on Newtown media coverage is that adopting social media as part of a journalist's toolkit requires revisiting journalism's fundamental principles — those elements that help define the professional paradigm.<sup>107</sup>

(b) *Armed conflict*

Second, front-page stories in the *New York Times* and *Education Week* documented a national rush to increase the number of armed officers on school campuses throughout the country — raising alarms from some critics who say more police inevitably mean more students are cited for nonviolent crimes and funneled from school into the juvenile justice system.<sup>108</sup> One measure of perceived school safety, as tracked by the National Center for Education Statistics, is the extent to which students fear being attacked or harmed while at school, on the way to or from school, or in other places away from school.<sup>109</sup>

Furthermore, while all gun deaths prompt some level of public grief and anxiety, the discourses surrounding the Sandy Hook tragedy were marked by a heightened sense of concern over a town that, was seen as particularly undeserving of violence.<sup>110</sup> Specifically, the discourse immediately following the shooting in Newtown focused primarily on the debate between gun ownership and gun control, with a secondary focus on the victims' coverage.<sup>111</sup> Searches for firearm types, the most common firearm-related queries, showed the least relative change after the

shooting incident, with a 50.06 % increase in the proportion of user searches.<sup>112</sup> In contrast, the law category of search queries after the shooting incident had a 535.47% increase in the proportion of searches, even though it was the least searched.<sup>113</sup>

Although users searching for gun types (+61.02 %) or ammunition (+173.15 %) were more likely to visit retail content on commercial entity websites after the shooting incident, a greater proportion (+1054.37 %) visited news content on commercial entity websites related to the shooting incident.<sup>114</sup> Law-related searches, however, had a higher proportion of visits to websites with educational content from non-commercial organizations (+702.70 %), commercial entities (+484.20 %), and educational institutions (+593.97 %).<sup>115</sup> Importantly, when examining changes in bicycle-related search terms (the counterfactual) before and after the incident, we observed a relatively modest decrease in overall searches (−8.64 %).<sup>116</sup> Additionally, the results show considerable heterogeneity in the impact of Sandy Hook on firearm sales per 100,000 people across states, ranging from zero in Maryland to 2,500 guns per 100,000 residents in New Hampshire.<sup>117</sup>

(c) *Political questioning*

The analysis was also enraged at politicians who were simply exploiting the dead and victims' families for no purpose other than political profit.<sup>118</sup> Research has shown that, despite discussions among politicians, none of the proposed gun control measures were passed, and there has yet to be a substantial response to the shooting. From the advocacy perspective, more people visited the websites of gun rights groups than those of gun control groups. Additionally, websites with a lower ratio of investment in advocacy experienced the greatest percentage growth from after the pre- to post-incident period.

Furthermore, a study questioned whether it's justifiable to dox somebody who has not violated any laws but merely holds a controversial opinion. For example, according to scholarly research,<sup>119</sup> on

<sup>107</sup> Berkowitz and Liu, "Media Errors and the "Nutty Professor"," 163.

<sup>108</sup> Brydolf, "Preparing for the Unthinkable: School Safety after Sandy Hook," 6.

<sup>109</sup> Benjamin W. Fisher, Maury Nation, Carol T. Nixon, and Sarah McIlroy, "Students' Perceptions of Safety at School After Sandy Hook," *Journal of School Violence* 16, no. 4 (2017): 350, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2015.1133310>.

<sup>110</sup> Hill, "'This Shouldn't Happen Here': Sandy Hook, Race, and the Pedagogy of Normalcy," 110.

<sup>111</sup> Schildkraut and Muschert, "Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools," 31.

<sup>112</sup> Menachemi, Rahurkar, and Rahurkar, "Using Web-Based Search Data to Study the Public's Reactions to Societal Events: The Case of the Sandy Hook Shooting," 4.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Phillip B. Levine and Robin McKnight, "Firearms and Accidental Deaths: Evidence from the Aftermath of the Sandy Hook School Shooting," *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)* 358, no. 6368 (2017): 1324–28, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aan8179>.

<sup>118</sup> See Duerringer, "Dis-Honoring the Dead: Negotiating Decorum in the Shadow of Sandy Hook."

<sup>119</sup> Ning, Shao, Yang, and Tyldesley, *Social Perspective an Intermediate-Advanced Chinese Course*, 99–100.

August 26, 2012, a major traffic accident occurred on a long-distance bus in Yan'an City, Shaanxi Province, resulting in 36 deaths and 13 injuries. Yang Dacai, a Shaanxi Province official, was instructed to rush to the accident scene. However, a news photo showed Yang smiling at the tragic accident scene, which immediately sparked outrage among netizens. Subsequently, the 'smiling official' became the target of doxing. As a result, netizens found photos of him wearing watches of different brands and styles, many of which were luxury goods. During this period, netizens also discovered that he had as many as 11 watches with a total value exceeding 200,000 yuan. Thus, he was given the title 'Watch Uncle.' The anti-corruption department, therefore, launched an investigation into his alleged corrupt activities.

The results of online anti-corruption campaigns have put officials in the public spotlight, as in the case of 'Watch Uncle' Yang Dacai, who was found guilty of disciplinary violations and corruption during his tenure. Yang Dacai was dismissed from all positions in the Communist Party and sentenced to 14 years in prison. In this regard, while some argue that doxing is a necessary tool for holding public figures accountable, others question its ethics and legality when used against private individuals who hold controversial opinions but have not broken any laws.

Thus, online vigilantes often engage in doxing to express their objections and harass their targets. They strive to expose misconduct by the person they have identified, believing that individual should face public scandal for it.

#### (d) *Cyber trolling*

Based on the study, very little significant information was released by the media about Adam Lanza or the investigation, particularly in the first week of coverage.<sup>120</sup> Instead, the media focused on telling the stories of heroic educators and the tragic losses of innocent children.<sup>121</sup> Thus, the media has provided people with a powerful platform to share information, but it also puts personal information at risk. The continual reframing of the story allows the media to highlight different aspects of the narrative, typically resulting in fresh content and increased viewer engagement.<sup>122</sup> Besides differences in framing at various levels for the aggregate data set, the analysis also revealed that the framing evolved over the lifespan of the events.<sup>123</sup> Cases of doxing or other cyberbullying incidents may

jeopardize the professional or personal reputations of victims.<sup>124</sup> Common cyberbullying incidents on social media platforms may include direct attacks, such as shaming and denigration, in which social media users troll individuals to silence, publicly embarrass, or discredit them.<sup>125</sup> To illustrate the issue, since the relatives of the victims in Newtown, Connecticut, were commonly affluent and well-educated, the media extrapolated that the wealthy, intellectual, and hard-working were less deserving of death than the poor, who are typically depicted as a societal burden reliant on government aid.

#### (e) *Professional practice gaps*

Fifth, a study of the first 30 days of coverage of the Sandy Hook case demonstrated that the media exploited continual scaffolding switching, mainly with respect to communicating on the spatial level, to accentuate diverse facets of the story that let the media uphold the case as fresh, which again fulfilled the audience's appetite to swallow untouched and distinctive facets of the tale.<sup>126</sup>

An inadequate flow of data components to the reporting media was teeming with errors that divulged a chink in journalistic quality that ought to be fixed. Iconic in this fuss was Florida Atlantic University (FAU) communication professor James Tracy, anointed by one Miami newspaper columnist and heralded by Carl Hiaasen, who, about a month after the Sandy Hook shootings, wrote an opinion piece titled 'Keep Nutty Professor Around as Case Study' referring to him as the 'Nutty Professor'.<sup>127</sup> And precisely as the cyclone of attackers subsided, another menace arose against Prof. Tracy when the news media had once again crossed the boundary of professional technique. Similarly, the controversy involved conspiracy accusations by media studies when Prof. James Tracy, in his blog<sup>128</sup> 'Memory Hole', was portrayed as a 'media critic and educator'. This isn't just about Professor Tracy himself. It serves as an example of how, when the news media is accused of spreading false information, it can have broader implications. This

<sup>124</sup> Younes Karimi, Anna Squicciarini, and Shomir Wilson, "Automated Detection of Doxing on Twitter," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction* 6, no. CSCW2 (2022): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3555167>.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>126</sup> Similar situation happened with Columbine and other alike school shootings. See Christopher M. Mosqueda, Melissa A. Heath, Elizabeth A. Cutrer-Párraga, Robert D. Ridge, Aaron P. Jackson, and Erica Miller, "Analysis of 48 Hours of Television News Coverage Following the Columbine High School Shooting," *School Psychology Review* 52, no. 1 (2021): 57–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.18704100>.

<sup>127</sup> Carl Hiaasen, "Keep Nutty Professor Around as Case Study," *Tampa Bay Times*, 2013, <https://www.tampabay.com/opinion/columns/keep-nutty-professor-around-as-case-study/1271614>.

<sup>128</sup> See at <http://memoryholeblog.com>

<sup>120</sup> Schildkraut and Muschert, "Media Saliency and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools," 37.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

wasn't just a challenge to Tracy's credibility, but also a way of questioning the authority of the media as a whole. If Tracy had not been a media educator, his claims might have been written off as just another conspiracy theory.

*(f) Public health destruction*

Every controversy prompts reactions among targets and backers to some extent. In a righteous hysteria, a segment of society regards certain demeanors or lifestyle choices of another group to be a noteworthy menace to the community as a whole. For instance, the research found that during the initial phase of coverage, broadcasters didn't interview victims right away. Instead, journalists spoke<sup>129</sup> with community members, sharing personal stories that were naturally more emotional and less impartial due to the intense feelings involved. Nonetheless, when excessively exaggerated, warnings about overt, immediate issues such as media service can distract from covert, underlying subjects deeply implanted within the community, such as destitution or inequality. For example, the effect of the tragedy led to the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), a component of the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, to contact the New York University Center for Implementation-Dissemination of Evidence-based Practices Among States and declare the entire town of approximately 27,560 residents as victims.<sup>130</sup>

Also, doxing can be linked to digital activism, as some may believe it is a way to bring about social change. Yet, internet vigilantism employs doxing, where people who disagree with someone's views share their details online, leading to possible defamation. Likewise, the extremes include those that advocate banning the disclosure of any personal information and those that say that all personal information is already out there, arguing the privacy is dead.<sup>131</sup> Sun Microsystems, for example, supports privacy protection and is a member of the Online Privacy Alliance, an industry coalition that promotes the protection of individuals' privacy online.<sup>132</sup> Privacy can be seen as a barrier that reduces the spread of personal information, which makes it more difficult and economically inconvenient to gain

access to it.<sup>133</sup> The merit of the cyber-manhunt phenomenon is to put privacy into a relative context, avoiding the extremes that advocate either no friction at all or excessive restrictions that completely halt the flow of information.<sup>134</sup>

*(g) Inequality in tragedy treatment*

In the end, besides doxing consequences provided, the public responses reinforced two distinct notions of normalcy among Black and White subjects.<sup>135</sup>

Such approaches depart from the current historical moment's obsession with mass criminalization, blame, and containment. These affordances are routinely denied to Black killers like Christopher Dorner, John Allen Muhammad, or Colin Ferguson, for whom an equally compelling case for mental illness could be made.<sup>136</sup>

This disproportionate representation of White subjects as innocent victims allows for the reification of a racial subtext that renders other racial groups as 'less innocent' and therefore less worthy of our collective outrage and protection.<sup>137</sup> The most visible signpost of Black disposability is the contrast between the discourses surrounding the violence of Sandy Hook and spaces of violence against Black youth.<sup>138</sup> In quite literal terms, the commitment to protecting and avenging White innocence has reinforced the realities of Black disposability.<sup>139</sup>

Taking all the above into consideration, doxing has its evaluation driven by a discourse of digital vigilantes<sup>140</sup> about identity theft, armed trouble, political campaigns, cyber trolling, media professional practices, public health destruction, and inequality in facing doxing. This not only kept the initial surge in coverage going but also influenced where the doxing originated.

## Conclusions

Considering the research material and case study, answers were provided as to what doxing is, why it exists, and how unjustified it is.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 740.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Hill, "‘This Shouldn't Happen Here’: Sandy Hook, Race, and the Pedagogy of Normalcy," 110.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 110–1.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>140</sup> According to Shaun Aghili, "Digital vigilantes are often facilitating identity theft, cause reputational damage, extort money, or gain information about individuals as a part of a hacking activity. Examples include but are not limited to, legal names, aliases, birth dates, passport numbers, Social Security numbers, personal information related to immediate family members and friends, health-related information, photos posted on social media or company websites, current and previous employment status, various types of contact information, degrees, schools attended, professional certifications and memberships, hobbies, and banking, tax, mortgage, and other credit-related information" (Aghili, "Doxing," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Internet*, 2).

<sup>129</sup> Since broadcasters had covered previous (similar) school shootings, they knew which subjects would keep their coverage going. Because of this, the mass shooting was felt as a shared, public tragedy worldwide. The media flocked to the small town of Newtown/Sandy Hook to broadcast the unimaginable.

<sup>130</sup> Hoagwood et al., "Developing a Sustainable Child and Family Service System after a Community Tragedy: Lessons from Sandy Hook," 749.

<sup>131</sup> John Vacca, *Computer and Information Security Handbook* (2nd ed.) (Elsevier, 2013), 739.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

Doxing is a willful practice where an individual's personal information is deliberately released to the public on the internet by another party (doxer) with the intent — as a necessary criterion — to cause embarrassment, fear, intimidation, retribution, etc. Eventually, in the information media, doxers experience no fear or hindrance. Considering this practice, the author concluded that doxing has the following varieties:<sup>141</sup>

(a) intended to withdraw someone from obscurity or anonymity — *deanonymizing doxing* — involves demonstrating the real-life identity of a person who uses an incognito or pseudonymous identity,

(b) doxing that makes it easier to physically locate someone — *targeting doxing* — involves disseminating details that help the individual's physical location, such as their home address or workplace, and

(c) doxing that reveals personal data that undermines the identified person's credibility — *delegitimizing doxing* — involves conceding potentially discomfiting or scandalous facts about the individual.

Furthermore, the doxing phenomenon has three *logical and necessary levels*:

a. uncovering personally identifiable data,

b. releasing, and

c. announcing that information to such an extent that the consequence is when an audience acts on that information.

Accordingly, doxing has *three stages* to form: discovery, release, and response:

(1) the discovery stage is carried out in secret by activists who identify a transgressor or potential transgressor,

(2) the release, and

(3) the response stage requires an audience that may act against the identified individual.<sup>142</sup>

As a rule, the doxers use whatever information is available to them to search for further identifying details about the target. They may release whatever information they have in order to ask others for further information. Then, the release involves publishing identity information and publicizing the release of this information to create an audience that may act on it. Significantly, media, websites or alike

sources play a role in both the discovery and release stages.

The release of information is necessary to expose wrongdoing, especially in cases involving the 'public interest', which doxers often use as a justification for doxing credibility. At the same time, everything has two sides, and doxing is also a double-edged sword.<sup>143</sup> It can reflect the powerful barrier effect of netizen supervision and play a supplementary role in the fair oversight of society.<sup>144</sup> On the other hand, when someone's 'opinion' is exposed in the full view of the public, the innocent suffer significant harm from the danger of doxing due to the disappearance of responsible behavior, as seen when Alex Jones's statement about the Sandy Hook tragedy caused agony for the victims' families. However, the primary victims' needs should be prioritized, and community-based services should be offered separately from those for survivors.

Regardless, the author believes that, in order to correctly guide people and let them play the role of internet ambassadors, the operators of Infowar-like websites should integrate with society and double-check facts. Indeed, the way information is disseminated and presented in the release stage affects the potential audience, the likelihood of a response, and how that audience will harass or shame the identified individual.

The research has shown that doxing is a negative phenomenon that requires anti-doxing measures and widespread cooperation for well-being. Fundraising entities should have more oversight and focus on timely, transparent communication. The media should implement no-contact policies to ensure the safety of vulnerable victims. Strict

<sup>143</sup> Mixtures of doxing are portrayed as 'digital vigilantism,' challenging actual allowable conduct. Digital vigilantism may likewise echo a troubled connection between citizens and the state and may be framed as the shady flank of online attention through companion traditions such as cyber trolling. Nevertheless, for a state to thereupon release data publically to commit to doxing is exceptional.

<sup>144</sup> While aware of social commitment and the impact on their reputations, platforms profit from the madness of user shifting appearing from denunciatory drives, notably as even pressing concentrations will occur via these outlets. While this marvel is uplifted by people's original senses of umpire and translucence, it can lead to the across-the-board dissemination of personal data, breaking individuals' solitude. Nevertheless, this approach can have positive effects, particularly in possibilities where details need to be disclosed through official channels, likewise, as OSINT (Open-Source Intelligence Tools). In such instances, the doxing phenomenon can increase the current legal system and enable fairer societal charge. It can recollect the decisive barrier force of internet users' coordinated oversight and contain negative circumstances in civil society. Therefore, doxing, through its use and mishandling, highlights the challenge of suspending online interconnections with anonymity and privacy, both personally and in concern to others producing the debate more involved than unadorned individual privacy. Accordingly, doxing is a double-edged sword because while it can play a complementary role in society, it can also lead to significant privacy violations.

<sup>141</sup> Deanonymizing and targeting doxing responses to the 'who' and 'where' queries about an identity, delegitimizing doxing reveals 'why' this particular individual is of interest. Significantly, it is important to admit these differences to understand the ethical sense of doxing and its unique motivations and implications. Yet, doxing entails the defeat of something for the individual.

<sup>142</sup> David M. Douglas, "Doxing as Audience Vigilantism against Hate Speech," in *Introducing Vigilant Audiences*, ed. Daniel Trotter, Rashid Gabdulhakov, and Qian Huang (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020), 268–9, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0200>.

anti-stalking laws, both online and in person, should be enacted for victims of crimes. It is also important to consider the potential outcome and ethical implications. Age is a significant factor, as younger individuals are often seen as more vulnerable and in need of defense. Additionally, location matters, as those in typically secure places, such as schools, are often perceived as more naive than those in more public spaces, such as bars.<sup>145</sup>

The study supports the idea that by safeguarding our personal information and being mindful of our

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<sup>145</sup> Significantly, the work of Hill confesses the next: “The sentiment that ‘this shouldn’t happen here,’ combined with the use of racialized signifiers to describe residents of the 95 % White city of Newtown (e.g., ‘middle Americans,’ ‘kids next door,’ and ‘ordinary Americans’), help to frame the context as a space of racialized innocence” (Hill, “This Shouldn’t Happen Here”: Sandy Hook, Race, and the Pedagogy of Normalcy,” 110). Also, the research of KT Doerr confirms: “Despite the strong sentiment from the teachers to move to a different site, the task force concluded there was no option but to rebuild on the same site. To appease the teachers, the school district offered to move them to other schools in Newtown, essentially swapping positions with peers who had not been present the day of the massacre and thus, presumably, would be less sensitive about working in that place” (Doerr, “Never Forget Sandy Hook Elementary: Haunting Memorials to a School Massacre,” *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology* 10, no. 2-3 (2019): 181). Hence, according to James O. Olufowote and Jonathan Matusitz: “In the social system frame of the post-Sandy Hook sermons, clergy attributed the causal problems of mental illness to aspects of the mental health care system, specifically, the lack of financial resources dedicated to mental health, the lack of access to needed mental health care, and the lack of effective mental health treatment” (James O. Olufowote and Jonathan Matusitz, “‘How Dark a World It Is ... Where Mental Health Is Poorly Treated’: Mental Illness Frames in Sermons Given After the Sandy Hook Shootings,” *Health Communication* 31, no. 12 (2016): 1545, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2015.1089458>).

digital footprint, we can reduce the risk of online threats, including trolls, spilling into the real world. Consequently, the research calls for us to ‘watch our wards’ in order to mitigate doxing, as this phenomenon is the responsibility of all of us. The danger is that doxing is legal because it is not prohibited by law as a wrongful act. However, it interferes with privacy and security, both aimed at setting a satisfactory level of conservancy while permitting the flourishing of digital culture and innovation, rather than focusing on a model state of perfect security and privacy. Hence, considering the ‘easygoing’ nature of information on cyberspace, the presented research supports limitations on data spread and an internet governance regime with barriers,<sup>146</sup> and recommends further research. In the end, this research emphasizes the importance of ‘thinking twice’ before engaging in doxing.

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<sup>146</sup> For example, in the view of the author, doxing falls within the ambit of existing regulations; consequently, lobbying for undersized shifts in those laws is another prospect seeking to enhance internet governance.

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## ДОКСИНГ: НА ОСНОВІ ПРЕЦЕДЕНТУ В СЕНДІ-ХУК

Метою статті є з'ясування та розв'язання проблеми доксингу за допомогою тлумачення цього явища та вироблення антидоксингових заходів. За визначенням авторки, доксинг — це соціальна практика пошуку та розкриття в інтернеті інформації про події та їхніх учасників, яка ґрунтується на початковому намірі доксерів висвітлити обставини відповідно до його уявлень про справедливість задля сприйняття цих даних спільноту з подальшим громадським осудом. Зазвичай доксинг може спровокувати поведінку мережевої аудиторії та змінити результати опитувань громадської думки. З огляду на мету дослідження, авторка використовує методологію кейс-стаді: розглянуто сенсаційну справу з практики США, відому як Сенді-Хук. Згідно з хронологією подій, 14 грудня 2012 року Адам Ленза застрелив свою матір, а потім пішов у початкову школу Сенді-Хук у Ньютауні, штат Коннектикут. У цьому освітньому закладі він влаштував стрілянину, вбивши 20 учнів і шістьох співробітників, після чого вкоротив собі віку. Сім'ї загиблих зазнали травми не лише від події, а й від доксингу. Дослідження справи Сенді-Хук проілюструвало дію доксингу і підкреслило, наскільки важливим є аналіз і фільтрування споживачами інформації, отриманої з різних джерел. Це дослідження показує негативні наслідки доксингу для жертв, родичі яких загинули під час стрілянини, особливо після того, як конспіролог Алекс Джонс розкритикував ситуацію, охарактеризувавши стрілянину в Сенді-Хук як постановку, інсценування. Авторка пропонує запровадити політику інтернет- та медіауправління, яка б визначала кібервідповідальність і впроваджувала медіастрахування, щоб зменшити ризики впливу доксингу, та виробити правове реагування на дії доксерів.

Такі заходи також можуть допомогти захистити сторони від потенційної шкоди, спричиненої деструктивною практикою свободи дій у засобах масової інформації та інтернеті. Це важливо, оскільки, з огляду на вторинні виявлені в кейс-стаді негативні чинники, доксинг також пов'язаний з такими проблемами, як крадіжка особистих даних, збройні зіткнення, політичні питання, кібертролінг, професійна етика в медіа, негативні наслідки для громадського здоров'я в мережі та навіть прояви нерівності.

Отже, дослідження не лише підтримує початкові правові зміни щодо проблеми дифамації, а й відіграє важливу роль у вивченні еволюції доксингу та формуванні в суспільстві його розуміння.

**Ключові слова:** Infowars, Алекс Джонс, оприлюднення персональних даних в інтернеті, Адам Ленза, дифамація.

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