

The Ethics of Doxing

Should Doxing Be Used in Journalism?

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ABSTRACT

Doxing is a very common problem in this day and age. In this internet driven world, many people try their best to remain as anonymous as possible for many different reasons. However, due to doxing everyone who uses the internet is at risk of being doxed by just about anyone. In this paper we will cover the main definition of doxing, both sides of doxing, and a case that occurred due to doxing.

1 What is Doxing

What exactly is doxing? Well, doxing is the Internet-based practice of researching and publicly broadcasting private or identifying information about an individual or organization.^[1] This typically includes personal or identifying information that the individual would have rather kept private. This information can include things such as full name, address, phone number, place of work, or even social media.

1.1 Good vs. Bad

When people hear the term “Doxing” they typically only think of when doxing is used for bad purposes, but it can also be used for good as well. Doxing is mainly used by people in the negative way for things such as blackmail, bullying, or just to remove someone’s anonymity. These are all ways that doxing is used to harm a person or their reputation, but there are also ways doxing can be used for good. Say someone is accused by the media of some sort of wrongdoing and due to this, that person is harassed or bullied because of this wrongdoing. If that person were to discover the person who actually committed this wrongdoing and then release that information to

clear their own name, this would be a positive case of doxing that would be justified. Journalists nowadays use doxing in many different forms for both informational purposes and just for their own gain that comes from releasing a good story. When a journalist releases somebody else’s information about an event that has occurred with the sole intention of educating the public, then I believe this could be considered a positive use of doxing. But when a journalist uses their influence to release an anonymous person’s information against their will, then this would be considered a negative use of doxing. In the next section we will take a look into a case that occurred in 2014 that was very controversial at the time due to who was involved.

1.2 Bitcoin Case

In 2014 *Newsweek* journalist, Leah McGrath Goodman, published an article titled “The Face Behind Bitcoin”. This article was a major shock in the internet world since people had always speculated who the original creator of bitcoin was. Goodman had found information on exactly who the creator of bitcoin was and how she could contact him. In the article she disclosed the creator’s name, Satoshi Nakamoto, and his home address. The methods that she used to dox Nakamoto were a little more in depth than just a typical Google search. Goodman stated in the article, “It was only while scouring a database that contained the registration cards of naturalized U.S. citizens that a Satoshi Nakamoto turned up whose profile and background offered a potential match”.^[2] After the article was published, many people on large social platforms like Reddit and Twitter argued that what Goodman did was wrong and that she should not have released so much of Nakamoto’s private information. He originally wished to remain anonymous so that he and his family could live an

ordinary life, but due to Goodman's actions he could no longer stay anonymous.

1.3 Stakeholders

So, let's now cover who the stakeholders are in this case:

- First, we have the person who is being doxed, **Satoshi Nakamoto**
- Next we have the person doing the doxing, **Leah Goodman**
- We have to also include everyone associated with the person who has been doxed, so **Nakamoto's family**
- Lastly, we have the audience who is reading the doxed information, meaning **article's viewers**

The stakeholders involved in this case are affected in different ways. The person who has been doxed, aka Satoshi Nakamoto, has been made public as the creator of Bitcoin and even has his address released to everyone. This could be seriously damaging for Nakamoto and his family since someone who could have lost a lot of money in Bitcoin could try to come after him or even harass his family. On the other hand, the person who did the doxing, Leah Goodman, has released a very successful article which could earn her extra money from her company. But at the same time, she is being criticized and blamed on the internet for releasing Nakamoto's information. In the end, the people viewing the article are the ones who have the most to gain from this, since they are important information at no cost at all, while the other stakeholders all have something to lose.

1.4 Pros vs. Cons

The main issue with this case is whether or not journalists should be allowed to dox people just for an article.

• Pro Side

The pros that come with journalists being able to dox people include: the public getting information on an important topic, informing everyone about a wrongdoing that a person has committed, and even sharing information about an important political candidate for a presidential election.

• Con Side

The cons that come with journalists being able to dox people are: people who wish to stay anonymous can be revealed to the public, someone can be incorrectly accused of a wrongdoing and then harassed because of it, and someone who has been doxed could be fired from a job due to their boss seeing bad information about them.

1.5 My opinion

I believe that journalists do not have the right to dox people against their will. If someone wishes to stay anonymous on the internet, then it is their right to stay that way and nobody should be allowed to take that away. At the same time, I also believe that if someone consents to their information being released then it is fine to dox that person in an article.

1.6 Final thoughts

To sum everything up, doxing can be both beneficial and destructive depending on how it is used. When it comes to doxing for journalism though, the only time when it is ethically acceptable is when the person being doxed has given complete consent to having their information released to the general public. So, my final question for everyone is: Do you think that journalists have the right to dox people for online articles?

REFERENCES

- [1] Doxing (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved June 16, 2020 from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doxing>
- [2] Goodman, Leah The Face Behind Bitcoin, Newsweek (2014), www.newsweek.com/2014/03/14/face-behind-bitcoin-247957.html.