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Doxxing in Hong Kong: A Discourse-Analytic Perspective

香港的「起底」情況: 從話語的角度分析

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DOXXING IN HONG KONG: A
DISCOURSE-ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE
香港的「起底」情況：從話語的角度
分析

Final Report

Public Policy Research Funding
Scheme
(PROJECT NO.: 2021.A4.075.21A)

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Executive Summary

Abstract of Research (English)

Doxxing is commonly understood as deliberately seeking and publishing others' personal information without their consent. It is a matter of urgent concern in Hong Kong as it has threatened thousands of people's privacy and data security in recent years. One common motive of doxxing is to ruin victims' reputations by publicly shaming them, causing them emotional and/or physical harms. In October 2021, a new anti-doxxing bill was passed in Hong Kong and first arrests have been made.

Academic research on doxxing is surprisingly scant. The limited research in Hong Kong has approached doxxing from a social scientific and legal perspective. While these perspectives can help understand the psychological and legal implications of doxxing, they do not closely examine doxxing in its authentic communicative contexts. Understanding doxxing from a discourse perspective allows us to explain doxxing as a situated social practice, because it is the everyday discourses of and about doxxing that shape people's attitudes of doxxing, thus also affecting their decision to engage in doxxing or not. This project, therefore, aims to offer a timely investigation of Hong Kong young people's attitudes and perceptions towards doxxing and its law from a language and discourse perspective, so as to identify gaps in existing doxxing policy.

Phase 1 of the study investigated the discursive strategies of doxxing in Hong Kong by analyzing a database of authentic doxxing-related discussions (43 original posts and 28943 comments) on an online forum. Phase 2 analyzed university students' attitudes and perceptions through an online survey (N=500), 3 focus group interviews with 13 participants and 5 individual interviews. In Phase 3 of the study, we reviewed and analyzed in depth the definitions and representations of doxxing in 13 legal and policy documents to reveal possible mismatches between young people's and institutional understanding of the issue. In sum, our survey findings show that only 33% of the respondents were aware of the criminalization of doxxing in Hong Kong, and they also found certain expressions in the legal definitions ambiguous and confusing. In addition, doxxing was positively and negatively evaluated simultaneously by the interviewees: justification and framing strategies enabled a positive evaluation of doxxing as a justice-seeking tool and as a deterrent to others; at the same time, participants were found to reposition doxxed targets as victims experiencing harm, thus considering doxxing as a transgressive practice. We recommend that policy

makers and legal professionals collaborate with language and communication scholars to communicate complex legal language in a more comprehensible manner to a diverse audience. More public discussion on doxxing should be encouraged to elicit public opinion, so as to facilitate future policy development surrounding the issue.

研究摘要

起底（Doxxing）是指在未經他人同意下蓄意尋找並發布他人的個人資料。儘管根據隱私條例，起底可構成刑事罪行，但社會對於法例是否足以解決起底問題仍存在疑問。現時關於起底的學術研究多從心理學或法律角度出發，並未深入考慮起底在實際社會語境中的呈現。本項目旨在通過語言和話語角度解釋起底，並填補政策空白。起底是通過日常話語發起和維持的，因為人們經常遇到的起底話語會影響他們對起底的態度和看法，從而也影響他們參與起底行為的決定。本研究的第一階段分析網絡上與起底相關的討論，以了解網民的起底話語策略。第二階段通過調查、焦點小組和個人訪談分析大學生對起底的態度。第三階段分析政策文件中對起底的定義，以揭示年輕人與政府及法律對起底的理解可能存在偏差。研究結果將使政策制定者和教育者了解媒體素養教育的需求，以提高大眾對起底問題的批判性認識。

Layman summary on policy implications and recommendations

- 1) **Promoting legal language education:** Over half of the survey respondents found the official and legal definitions of doxxing on the PCPD website unclear or somewhat unclear, mainly caused by lengthy expressions and technical jargon, and the lack of illustrative examples of doxxing and its contexts. This implies that official definitions of doxxing lack clarity and precision. We recommend that the government work closely with the PCPD and be more proactive in explaining potentially ambiguous expressions: (i) provide an annotated list of common types of personal data; (ii) clarify how ‘specified harm’ is assessed; (iii) define ‘intent’ and explain how it is measured.
- 2) **Better understanding of public perceptions on doxxing:** Mismatches between public and official perceptions of doxxing have been identified. To the participants, doxxing could serve as a justice-seeking tool in some contexts, although it may be deemed

unacceptable according to the doxxing law. There is an urgent need to thoroughly understand public perceptions of the issue, as the first step to enhancing the public's critical awareness of doxxing is to understand their current attitudes and beliefs about doxxing. This can be achieved through conducting public forums or consultation sessions with focus groups prior to and after policy implementation.

3) **Recognizing the value of language-oriented research in policy development:** Some interviewees expressed concerns over the word 'intent' in the doxxing law and how intent is assessed and interpreted in investigations of doxxing cases, arguing that doxxing could be 'acceptable' under certain circumstances and motives. The participants defined doxxing in terms of a much wider range of motives and intents (e.g. public interest doxxing, jocular insults, and accidental doxxing) than the official definitions and the law, which tend to focus on harmful and malicious intent. Extensive linguistic research should be conducted to investigate different manifestations of doxxing, and the range of underlying motives and intents for the emergence of doxxing cases. We recommend that the government collaborate with language and communication experts in the process of investigating doxxing cases.

4) **Encouraging interdisciplinary research on doxxing and other online behaviors**

This project has demonstrated the relevance of language and discourse language in public policy development. The findings suggest that language plays a critical role in initiating, sustaining, and justifying doxxing. Despite increasing academic attention from legal and behavioral research, very little has been done from a linguistic perspective. We recommend that the government continue to provide funding support to interdisciplinary research, involving legal specialists, linguists, and psychologists, that probes into multifaceted nature of online behaviors.

研究項目對政策影響和政策建議的摘要

1) 促進法律語言教育：研究參與者對香港的起底行為表示不確定和矛盾，暗示相關法例缺乏清晰度和明確性。我們建議政策制定者和法律專家將法律語言教育納入正規學校課程，引導學生自我反思網上行為，以提高對起底的批判意識。

2)了解公眾對起底的認知：本研究發現公眾和官方對起底的定義存在分歧,我們建議政府通過焦點小組討論,公共論壇或諮詢會議,可更徹底了解公眾對起底問題的認知及看法。

3)認清語言及語言學家在網上行為的角色：我們建議政府在調查起底案件的過程中與語言和傳播專家合作,對起底的不同表現形式,潛在動機和意圖進行廣泛的學術研究。

4)鼓勵跨學科研究：我們建議政府繼續撥款支持對起底和其他網上行為的跨學科研究,匯集應用語言學、法學、心理學和社會科學領域的專家,從多角度調查起底現象。

Introduction and Background

Doxxing is commonly understood as seeking and publishing targets' personal data without their consent, often with the aim of publicly shaming targets for their alleged wrongdoings. The word 'doxx' or 'dox' originates from 'docs', short form for 'documents'. As an act of digital vigilantism, doxxing exposes the target's 'true' identity and invites public shaming, seeking retributive justice and deterring others from engaging in similar actions (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2021; Trottier, 2020).

In Hong Kong, doxxing (起底) has existed since before social media. It has however attracted increasing media coverage since the 2019 social movement when the personal data of police officers, protesters, journalists, and their families were published, unauthorized, on various online platforms. Policy development surrounding doxxing and its criminalization in Hong Kong has evolved since we first drafted our proposal for funding. Notably, the anti-doxxing bill was passed in October 2021, soon followed by the first arrest in December in the same year. Based on our extensive review of 124 media reports on doxxing between 2015 and 2022, the following timeline summarizes the key moments and events of doxxing in Hong Kong.

Date	Event
28-Jul-2015	Government called for restricting access to public registers.
1-Aug-2016	Cases of doxxing increased as the LegCo Election drew near. Privacy Commissioner Stephen Wong urged internet users to respect the privacy of individuals.
7-Nov-2017	A financial consultant was charged with using others' personal data in direct marketing without consent. Personal data obtained from public domains were also protected under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (PDPO).

9-Jun-18	Academics urges the government to legislate against cyberbullying. A scholarly study (Chen et al., 2018) found that 30% of secondary school students have experienced doxxing.
13-Jul-19	Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau arrested 7 men and 2 women for "access to computer with criminal or dishonest intent" and "disclosing personal data without consent" of 600 police and their family members.
25-Sep-19	A 32-year old man was arrested for exposing the data of over 2,300 police officers, which were acquired through company databases, on the Telegram channel "Dad Finds Boy".
25-Oct-19	The Court granted an interim injunction order to ban doxxing against police officers and their families.
27-Oct-19	Privacy Commissioner Stephen Wong propounded that doxxing has already been "weaponized" and sought greater power to curb doxxing.
8-Nov-19	Updates about doxxing on Telegram channel "Dad Finds Boy" were ceased.
26-Mar-20	First lawsuit for the violation of injunction committed by a female netizen who exposed the pictures, social media accounts, and addresses of police officers being doxxed.
19-Oct-20	District councillor Cheng Lai-king was found guilty of breaching the injunction by posting personal details of a police officer.
30-Oct-20	Another interim injunction was granted to ban unlawful doxxing activities targeting at Judicial Officers and their family members.
30-Mar-21	A 26-year-old waitress, who was also one of the admins of the Telegram channel "Boys Finds Dad and Mum", was found guilty for violating the colonial-era sedition law by "inciting violence" and spreading anti-government claims.
11-May-21	Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau proposed amendments to PDPO to request the criminalization of doxxing behaviours as an offence.

16-Jul-21	The Personal Data (Privacy) (Amendment) Bill 2021 was gazetted to criminalise doxxing activities, and the PCPD was granted the power to issue cessation notices to remove doxxing content.
21-Jul-21	The first and second reading of the bill began, along with the proposal of HK\$1 million fine and 5-year imprisonment as the maximum penalty.
14-Sep-21	A clerical assistant of the Immigration Department was sentenced to 45 months in jail after doxxing 215 police officers.
8-Oct-21	The new anti-doxxing law was passed and came into effect. The privacy commissioners were conferred power to demand internet service providers to remove doxxing-related content.
13-Dec-21	First arrest under the anti-doxxing law in which a 31-year-old man was accused of posting the personal details of the victim with whom he had monetary feud.
27-Apr-22	Second arrest under the law. A 41-year-old man was arrested for allegedly disclosing the personal information of 3 individuals who he had business dispute with
11-May-22	Third arrest. A 23-year old man was arrested for violating "Cap. 486 Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance – Section 64 Offences for disclosing personal data without consent" by disclosing the personal data of over 70 police officers and district councillors on social media platforms.
17-May-22	PCPD called for shutting down Telegram due to the resurgence of doxxing.
20-May-22	First person charged under the new anti-doxxing law.

Table 1: A timeline of doxxing and criminalization in Hong Kong

Despite increasing media and institutional attention to doxxing, academic research on doxxing has been surprisingly scant. The limited research in Hong Kong has approached doxxing from a psychological or legal perspective (e.g. Chen et al., 2018, Chen et al., 2019). While these perspectives offer important insights into understanding the mental impact and

legal implications of doxxing, little is known about how doxxing unfolds and interpreted in its authentic communicative contexts (but see Lee, 2020). A language and communication perspective is meaningful because doxxing, similar to other forms of online abuse, is initiated and sustained through language and everyday discourses. How people talk about doxxing also reveals their perceptions and attitudes towards this social practice. Understanding doxxing from a discourse perspective allows us to explain doxxing as a social practice, because it is the everyday discourses of and about doxxing that shape people's attitudes of doxxing and their interpretations of its legal consequences. Through closely examining people's discourses surrounding doxxing, the findings generated from this study can inform existing policies in identifying the extent to which the public is informed and their level of awareness of the law and their perceptions of it, so as to identify gaps in existing policies.

Objectives of the study and Research Questions

This study contributes to the limited research on doxxing in Hong Kong by offering a discourse-analytic perspective to this social issue. It also aims to identify policy and education needs related to issues of doxxing. There are five main objectives of the study:

1. To understand how online discourses surrounding doxxing enable and justify doxxing practices;
2. To understand Hong Kong young people's attitudes and perceptions of doxxing;
3. To identify possible mismatches between young people's and institutional definitions of doxxing;
4. To identify policy and education needs to enhance young people's critical awareness of doxxing.

To achieve these four objectives, we conducted a multi-method research project that examines discourses of and about doxxing practices in Hong Kong, with the aim of addressing the following research questions:

RQ1: How is doxxing defined, perceived, and justified online?

RQ2: What are Hong Kong young people's attitudes and perceptions of doxxing?

RQ3: How is doxxing defined and represented in legal and government contexts? In what ways are these definitions similar to or different from the perceptions identified in RQs 1 and 2?

RQ4: What are the implications for the development of education policy in order to enhance young people's critical awareness towards doxxing?

RQ1 aims to examine how doxxing is enacted online by analyzing how it is linguistically and discursively represented in authentic online communication. In particular, it delves into how online participants draw on covert and manipulative language to define, interpret, and justify doxxing. This part of the project lends support to the discursive nature of all social actions, as informed by Critical Discourse Analysis. With university students as our target participants, RQ2 investigates young people's attitudes towards doxxing based on an online survey, as well as examines the specific perceptions of doxxing based on interviews with a sample of university students. By analyzing legal and government documents related to doxxing, RQ3 aims to compare young people's understanding of the issue with institutional definitions of doxxing. RQ4 will draw on all research results to assess the education needs that can help improve young people's attitudes towards doxxing. Findings of this study will inform policymakers and educators of the needs of digital literacy education to enhance students' critical awareness of issues surrounding doxxing.

Review of Research Background

Doxxing: Definitions and Motivations

Recent online practices of call-out culture, cancel culture and digital vigilantism (Trottier, 2017) have given rise to online doxxing, commonly understood as seeking and publishing targets' personal data without their consent, often with the aim of publicly shaming targets for their alleged wrongdoings. This general definition of doxxing tends to be guided by mass media reports that tend to emphasize the 'name and shame', intentional, malicious and harmful nature of doxxing. One of the most recognized and recognizable motives of doxxing is to ruin victims' reputation through public shaming, causing emotional and even physical harms to the victims. Doxxing, however, is a complex social action and is hard to be defined in a short sentence. As society becomes increasingly mediatized, one does not need to be a hacker to retrieve and share other's information publicly online. As soon as people post content to their social media profile, whether it is intended to be shared privately or publicly, they are already exposing themselves to an unknown audience. For example, a 'private' Facebook post that is intended for friends only can easily be reshared by a friend to an unexpected audience. This phenomenon is called the 'context collapse' of social media, i.e., the 'collapse of infinite possible contexts' into one, with an 'infinitely ambiguous audience' (Wesch, 2009, p. 23). Other factors also contribute to 'accidental' disclosure and distributions of personal data, such as the policy of using real names in social media platforms. Many social media users may lack privacy awareness when they post on social media (Wauters et al., 2014). Doxxing as a complex social behavior is often discussed in connection with other online behaviors, such as shaming, defamation, and hate speech, which are anti-social and aggressive in nature.

A limited body of academic research has attempted to define doxxing in terms of methods, intents, and loss to victims. Douglas (2016) is the first to offer a systematic classification of doxxing into three major categories: *deanonymizing* doxxing, the release of personal information to reveal the identity of a formerly anonymous individual; *targeting* doxxing, the disclosure of personal information that locates the target's physical location and or contact details which were previously private; and *delegitimizing* doxxing, revealing intimate personal information that damages the reputation of an individual. Refining

Douglas' categorization, Anderson and Wood (2021) provide a finer-grained categorization of doxxing based on loss and harm, in addition to motives. The seven mutually non-exclusive motivations are extortion, silencing, retribution, controlling, reputation-building, unintentional, and doxxing in the public interest. Among these, unintentional doxxing and doxxing in the public interest are not necessarily malicious in intent. Unintentional doxxing is completely accidental. For example, journalists, through their journalistic investigation, may fail to protect the anonymity of individuals accidentally without the intent to doxx. Lastly, public interest doxxing is "motivated by a belief that the release of personally identifiable or proprietary information will promote the welfare or well-being of the general public" (Anderson & Wood, 2021: 209). Indeed, not all instances of doxxing aim to harm. Despite its potential to cause psychological or physical harm to victims, doxxing has been used to reinstate social justice and morality. In mainland China, the Human Flesh Search Engine (人肉搜尋), i.e. netizens collectively gathering targets' personal information, has reportedly uncovered such illegal acts as corruption of government officials, resulting in doxxed targets being fired or arrested. This example, according to Anderson & Wood, can be considered a form of public interest doxxing.

[Doxxing in Hong Kong](#)

In Hong Kong, doxxing has become a matter of serious concern in recent years. Since the social unrest in June 2019, doxxing activities 'surge dramatically to an alarming level' (PCPD, 2020b). Between June and December 2019, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Personal Data (PCPD) received about 4,700 doxxing-related complaints, over 1,500 of which involved doxxing of police officers and their families (PCPD, 2020a). Upon online inspection and investigation, the PCPD has identified over 4,500 instances of doxxing-related content from over 3,200 web links across multiple online platforms. To date, only about 60% of these web links have been removed upon the PCPD's request (PCPD, 2020a). Information being disclosed includes police officers' full names, phone numbers, home addresses, spouses' and children's names, and schools attended. Such information is then published on online forums and social media along with photographs and screenshots from the targets' personal social media profiles (Forsyth, 2020). What followed was a series of bullying, public shaming and harassment of these officers and their families (SCMP, 2019a). Victims have felt intimidated by aggressors' phone calls and random visiting of their families' workplaces,

and some have even received death threats. According to Li & Whitworth (2022), protestors used doxxing police officers and their family as a site of contention to generate fear and anxiety among the police. Being aware of the power of personal data and privacy, doxxing also became a protest tactic to shift the top-down power relation between the police and the protestors (Li & Whitworth). In 2020, other members of the public including medical officers, legislative council members, and government officials have also been doxxed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and other socio-political conflicts.

Even before the 2019 social unrest, doxxing was already a recognized ‘internet culture’ in Hong Kong. Young people are amongst the victims and aggressors of doxxing. In a survey by Chen et al. (2019), 12% of Hong Kong teenagers in their study reported either having been doxxed or engaged in doxxing online. Most incidents of doxxing begin with disclosure of the target’s ‘unreasonable’ behavior (as perceived by doxxers), which is captured by aggressors in photos or videos and shared on multiple online platforms for public scrutiny. This kind of ‘call-outs’ allows aggressors to feel ‘morally good’ as they believe they are doing justice to reveal others’ ‘wrong-doings’ (Ditum, 2014). Questions arise as to whether the call-out is in proportion to the victim’s original ‘offence’. As an example, in May 2020, a Hong Kong woman posted a photo of her pet parrot in a microwave on her Facebook page, which, according to her, was meant to be a joke. Her photo immediately went viral online, attracting a large number of netizens who accused and shamed her for animal cruelty. She quickly apologized, saying that the microwave was not on and that her parrot was well and unharmed. However, some netizens continued to harass her and even threaten to expose her phone number and call her. The target felt stressed and depressed, and filed a police report. So far, no one has been arrested (*The Standard*, 2020).

While the action of publishing others’ personal data per se may seem harmless, doxxing has reportedly caused emotional distress to targets, and can lead to more serious offences beyond the screen, such as swatting, i.e. the act of making hoax calls to emergency services in attempt to lure a large number of police officers to a victim’s address (Calabro, 2018; Chen et al., 2019). Doxxing can result in different forms of cyberbullying, i.e. ‘one or more persons being cruel to another [...] using technological means.’ (Olsson & Luchjenbroers, 2014, p.142). It has been reported that teenage victims of cyberbullying in Hong Kong suffer from depression and are at risk of suicides (SCMP, 2017). Adults are equally vulnerable to

doxxing and cyberbullying. In 2018, a 27-year-old woman attempted to commit suicide after being mocked by netizens for sharing her sexual harassment experience on Facebook (HK01, 2018).

Existing Measures and Policies on Doxxing in Hong Kong

Since the beginning of this project, much has changed in Hong Kong's legal measures against doxxing. As mentioned in the Introduction, doxxing can be prosecuted under section 64 (2) of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap.486) (the "Ordinance"), quoted below:

- (i) A person commits an offence if the person discloses any personal data of a data subject which was obtained from a data user without the data user's consent, with an intent to obtain gain in money or other property, whether for the benefit of the person or another person; or to cause loss in money or other property to the data subject.
- (ii) A person commits an offence if the person (discloser) discloses any personal data of a data subject without the relevant consent of the data subject with an intent to cause any specified harm to the data subject or any family member of the data subject, or being reckless as to whether any specified harm would be (or would likely be), caused to the data subject or any family member of the data subject.
- (iii) A person commits an offence if the person (discloser) discloses any personal data of a data subject without the relevant consent of the data subject with an intent to cause any specified harm to the data subject or any family member of the data subject, or being reckless as to whether any specified harm would be (or would likely be), caused to the data subject or any family member of the data subject; and the disclosure causes any specified harm to the data subject or any family member of the data subject.

A variety of channels are adopted to publicize the new law, including promotional videos and sound clips on TV and radio. A new webpage¹ dedicated to doxxing offences was added to the PCPD website shortly after the revision of the law. Under the scope of the amended Ordinance, not only can the PCPD investigate complaints and cases related to doxxing, but it is also granted the powers "to conduct criminal investigation, institute prosecution and issue

¹ https://www.pcpd.org.hk/tc_chi/doxxing/index.html

cessation notice”. It also oversees the reinforcement of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (PDPO) of the HKSAR.

Legal measures could only be effective if complemented by public education that helps people understand the harm caused by doxxing. Doxxing is an extremely complex issue, with a multitude of motives and methods, that can lead to different forms of online and physical bullying. And it is often too late when harm is already caused. Critical literacy education that aims at developing responsible and ethical digital citizens is essential, and such education should start early. Over the years, the PCPD has offered youth education programmes related to data protection, primarily in the forms of resource websites and public seminars. However, much emphasis has been on the technical aspects of protecting one’s own data; relatively little has been done from the aggressors’ perspective. NGOs such as the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society (香港家庭福利會) and the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (香港青年協會) have put much effort into educating the public about cyberbullying and internet safety. However, to date, education activities related to doxxing are still limited. We believe, as stated in our original proposal, the first step to enhancing the public’s critical awareness of doxxing is to understand their current attitudes and beliefs about doxxing, and how doxxing practices are justified through discourses and linguistic manipulations perpetuated online. It is against this backdrop that this project focuses on linguistic realizations and discourse strategies surrounding doxxing.

Doxxing as Discursive Action

Academic research on doxxing has been surprisingly scant. The limited research in Hong Kong has approached doxxing from a social scientific and legal perspective (e.g. Chen et al., 2018, Chen et al., 2019, Li & Whitworth, 2022). While these perspectives are helpful in understanding the mental impact and legal implications of doxxing, they do not closely examine doxxing in its authentic communicative contexts. Doxxing, similar to other forms of online practices, largely manifests itself in language and discourse. In addition, being aware of the possible legal consequences of doxxing, doxxers and bystanders are likely to manipulate their linguistic and discursive resources to avoid being discovered by authorities.

Although to date there has been little substantial linguistic and discourse research on doxxing per se (but see Lee, 2020), there is an emerging body of language-based research on verbal aggression that draws on both micro-linguistic and macro-discourse analyses. At the micro-level, linguistic devices such as irony, metaphors and non-standard orthography have been deployed in hate speech and aggressive behavior online (Herring, 1999; Assimakopoulos et al., 2017). Online aggression does not necessarily involve overtly aggressive language. For example, dehumanizing metaphors such as ‘mice’ and ‘worms’ are common ‘soft hate speech’ devices to refer to refugees or immigrants (Baider & Constantinou, 2020). At the macro-level of discourse practices, delegitimation strategy, such as rejecting the professionalism of certain social groups, is often employed to justify verbal abuse online (Kagan et al., 2019). Focusing on trolling, Hardaker (2013) identifies a range of covert discourse strategies, such as the strategy of ‘digress’, i.e. ‘straying away from the purpose of the discussion’. Research on extreme racist discourse has also shown that harmful speech is often justified as ‘just a joke’ (Billig, 2001; Fink, 2011). Billig (2001) analyzes the meta-discourse that justifies racist humour online, arguing that the so-called racist humour is not just a joke, but a strategy of ‘saying the unsayable’, such as calling to violence (Billig, 2001, p.270). Fink (2011) also found that in the virtual world Second Life, ‘griefing’, disruptive behaviors in virtual worlds, is often represented by gamers as ‘play’. Online grievers adopt various rhetorical frames and assume different identities, including what Fink calls a ‘jester’ frame, to justify the negative effect of griefing. Within the jester frame, griefing is legitimate game play that has no legal consequences. These covert strategies are part and parcel of the aggressor’s design to cause discomfort and emotional harm to victims, whilst maintaining a stance of ‘plausible deniability’ that is enabled by the use of the linguistically and discursively hidden signs of aggression.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Policy Implications

This project understands discourses of and about doxxing through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Discourse, in its broadest sense, refers to the use of language in its social contexts (Widdowson, 1995). CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse in all contexts. It emphasizes the importance of language in urgent social issues such as racism, social inequality, hate speech, and online aggression. CDA holds that discourse is a social practice that is shaped by and in turn also shapes the situation,

institution, and social structure that frame the discourse (Wodak, 2014, p. 303). In other words, people's actions and attitudes towards a certain social problem are largely determined by the everyday discourses that we routinely encounter (Teo, 2000). CDA has been employed widely to inform policies, including education policies. For example, Liasidou (2011) uses CDA to reveal how children with Special Education Needs are often represented or 'disempowered' as 'abnormal' in policy documents in Cyprus. She urges researchers and policy makers to critically engage in the language issues in policy documents, so as to promote the use more inclusive language and inclusive education policies.

In the context of this study, it is the everyday discourses of and about doxxing that shape people's attitudes and perceptions of it, as well as their decision to engage in doxxing or not. The role of discourse analysts is thus to uncover ideologies of doxxing that may be hidden in people's everyday discourse. CDA is also 'problem-oriented and interdisciplinary' in approach (Wodak & Meyer 2009, p. 2), which makes it a particularly powerful framework to analyze complex social problems such as doxxing. To the best of our knowledge, few studies have approached doxxing from a discourse-analytic perspective. The most relevant study that we have come across is Baasanjav et al. (2019), which is a critical discourse analysis of media representations of the 'human flesh search machine' (人肉搜尋器) phenomenon, the equivalent to doxxing in China. From the perspective of media research, Baasanjav et al. conducts a comparative analysis of the discursive representations of privacy in three newspapers in China and the US. Their study reveals conflicting views of privacy between netizens, media, and the government. Our study aims to offer a more comprehensive analysis that draws on discourses of and about doxxing from a wider range of contexts, and identify the possible mismatches between doxxing-related discourses from online communicative contexts, and those stated in government policy and legal documents.

Addressing the issue of doxxing requires comprehensive efforts from multiple stakeholders. Policymakers should commit to raising young people's critical awareness of issues and legal implications surrounding doxxing and include doxxing as an essential topic of every student's media literacy education. Not only should students know how to protect their own privacy, but they should also understand the problems with online discourses that justify the practice and minimize its potential harms. Our findings of covert discourse strategies of doxxing can potentially be incorporated into the existing curriculum of Life and

Society (core module 3: Human Relationships) under the Education Bureau's key learning area of Personal, Social and Humanities Education.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a multi-method approach to data collection and analysis, largely driven by qualitative discourse analysis and interpretation. **Phase 1** of the study contextualized the study by reviewing 124 media reports, and analyzed the discursive strategies of doxxing in a database of authentic doxxing-related discussions (43 original posts and 28943 comments) on LIHKG. **Phase 2** analyzed university students' attitudes and perceptions through an online survey (N=500), three focus group sessions involving 13 participants and 5 individual interviews. In **Phase 3** of the study, we analyzed in depth the definitions and representations of doxxing in 13 legal and policy documents to reveal possible mismatches between young people's and institutional understanding of the issue.

PHASE 1: Contextualizing and Revealing Discourses of Doxxing

Review of Academic Literature and Media Reports on Doxxing

Before the data collection, we performed an extensive and up-to-date literature review of the theoretical and conceptual background of doxxing. This literature review is important in establishing the theoretical framework of the study. We also reviewed 124 media reports from various local newspapers in Hong Kong to understand the latest situation of doxxing. With the introduction of the new doxxing law in October 2021, reviewing news reports allowed us to gather timely and the most relevant empirical evidence of doxxing in Hong Kong.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Doxxing-related Online Communication (Addressing RQ1)

To address RQ1, a database of authentic online interaction comprising 43 posts and 28943 comments was collected from LIHKG (連登) to identify how doxxing is constructed through online discourses and to unpack the argumentation strategies that justify doxxing. LIHKG is one of the most popular local forums among young people in Hong Kong, and it has been involved in high-profile cases of cyberbullying and doxxing (SCMP, 2019c). This forum is believed to be frequented by university students, as only people with university email accounts or designated Internet Service Providers can sign up to be members. For this study, two types of posts were collected: The first type involves perceived doxxing posts in which someone else's personal information is disclosed for 'naming and shaming'; The second type

of posts are online comments that respond to doxxing-related news. A keyword search for 起底 (doxxing) was conducted via the LIHKG search engine to identify relevant posts for analysis. Collecting these posts is important in that they represent how doxxing is expressed in their actual context of use. Analyzing the content and linguistic realizations of these posts also reveals how doxxing is discursively framed and how such discursive framing may be manipulative to legitimize doxxing in a covert manner.

When selecting and reviewing the posts for further analysis, we focused on threads that cover the types of doxxing identified in Douglas (2016) and Anderson & Wood (2021). In other words, the content of the posts should be concerned with revealing targets' personal information (deanonymizing), locating them physically or online (targeting), and revealing their misconduct (delegitimizing), extortion, silencing, retribution, controlling, reputation-building, unintentional, and doxxing in the public interest. It must be emphasized that the aim of the project is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of doxxing-related discourse, nor do we aim to provide a single definition of doxxing. Our qualitative discourse analysis enables a more situated understanding of doxxing, thus revealing its complexity. Although the term 'doxxing' has been given some official and legal attention, its meaning varies across individuals on LIHKG (Lee, 2020). For this reason, how doxxing is (re)defined and justified by different social actors deserves further attention in its own right. Crucially, the critical discourse analysis allows us to unpack the argumentation strategies that legitimize and justify doxxing. In terms of the language of data, this study collected posts written in languages and codes that are of close relevance to Hong Kong, i.e. Chinese (Cantonese, Standard Written Chinese), English, and creative forms of language mixing that is evident in online platforms (Barton & Lee, 2013; Lee, 2017).

PHASE 2: Understanding Attitudes and Perceptions of Doxxing

Surveying and Interviewing University Students (Addressing RQ 2)

Having obtained an informed and up-to-date understanding of the discursive nature of doxxing in Phase 1, Phase 2 of the study aims to elicit data on young people's attitudes and perceptions of doxxing. Undergraduate students from Hong Kong universities were our target

participants because (i) the limited research of doxxing in Hong Kong has focused primarily on teenagers (e.g. Chen et al., 2019); and (ii) university students were active participants in local online forums where doxxing is prevalent (SCMP, 2019b). Although the target participants may not be directly involved in doxxing, it is reasonable to assume that they were aware of doxxing-related discussions before and after the social unrest. An online questionnaire was administered to undergraduate students from different universities in Hong Kong to provide a snapshot of trends in their attitudes and perceptions. Our target respondents were all residents in Hong Kong, aged between 18-22. This group was chosen as this age group has the highest internet penetration rate (99.8%) according to HKSAR statistics in 2019. Although other age groups are equally vulnerable to doxxing, research has shown that young people are more likely to respond negatively to cyberbullying, such as self-harm and attempted suicides (John et al., 2018).

The online questionnaire consists of 15 questions and took around 15-20 minutes to complete. The survey was made available on the free survey service Qualtrics. Target respondents were invited via various means, including university mass email services, the investigators' personal contacts, and virtual class visits. By the end of March 2022, 500 respondents² completed the questionnaire.

The key set of questions takes reference from Assimakopoulos et al.'s (2017) questionnaire on perceptions of hate speech, which consists of the following parts:

- (i) Likert scale ratings of selected definitions and statements about doxxing, so as to elicit respondents' perceptions of the issue;

² The 5th wave of the pandemic posed various challenges to data collection. A request for reducing the sample size from 1,500 respondents to 500 was endorsed by PICO in March 2022. We believe 500 respondents as a sample size is sufficient for the purpose of this one-year exploratory project. First, our project is essentially **discourse-oriented**. The survey, as stated in our original proposal, serves to "provide a snapshot of trends in their attitudes and perceptions" and to recruit focus group and individual interview participants. With the 500 responses, patterns of attitudes towards doxxing have emerged, thus achieving Objectives 2 and 3. Second, it is a **multi-method project** that does not rely solely on the quantitative survey data. The core and most valuable data sources are the discourse-based data, i.e. texts from LIHKG, transcripts of focus group and individual interviews, and policy documents. In addition, we reviewed the number of survey respondents in similar projects conducted overseas. For example, the EU-funded C.O.N.T.A.C.T. project is a discourse-oriented project on hate speech adopting a mixed-methods research design with interviews and survey data. The survey involved only 130 respondents. We therefore believe that the revised sample size is comparable to those in research of similar nature. As all of the objectives have been achieved, we do not notice any negatively impact to the overall quality of the project as a result of the change in survey sample size.

- (ii) Likert scale ratings of acceptability of authentic examples of doxxing discourse identified in the forum data collected in the first part of the study;
- (iii) Multiple choice questions on respondents' overall experience with doxxing (e.g. whether they have been victims or perpetrators or both);
- (iv) Participants' level of understanding of the new doxxing law and their rating of the clarity of the language used in the law.

Combining questionnaire and interviews has been proved useful in much cyberbullying research to 'capture broader perspectives and to pursue issues of interest with more targeted and in-depth questions' (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017: 20; Adams & Cox, 2008). Following the online survey, 13 participants (divided into 3 groups) were invited to focus-group interviews to discuss their understanding and experience of doxxing. The focus-group participants were selected based on their responses in the survey to cover a wide range of doxxing experience, and their varying attitudes and perceptions of the issue. An interview protocol was developed based on the participants' responses in the survey. Key topics in the interviews include a discussion of participants' definitions of doxxing, and the reasons for their ratings in the survey. Each focus group discussion was conducted on Zoom and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Additionally, 5 semi-structured individual interviews were conducted to follow-up on specific themes emerging from the focus-group interviews. Individuals were asked to share their experience of doxxing upon their consent. Each individual interview, also carried out on Zoom, lasted around 60 minutes. A combination of both focus-group and individual interviews enhances data richness as the former contextualizes the phenomenon under research and the latter reveals specific themes in richer detail (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). All of the interviews were conducted in Cantonese and recorded on Zoom. Ethics clearance from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and informed consent from all participants were obtained.

PHASE 3: Identifying Policy and Education Needs

Analyzing Institutional Documents (Addressing RQs 3 & 4)

The third phase of the study analyzed the discursive representations of doxxing in legal documents and government depictions of doxxing, so as to compare institutional definitions

with the discourses of doxxing revealed in the first two parts of the study. We collected a total of 77 documents related to key doxxing cases in Hong Kong (See Table 2 for a summary of the documents collected). We broadly divided these documents into two major types: Government and PCPD publications include press releases on the PCPD website, documents and guidelines published by the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau (CSTCB) of the Hong Kong Police Force, and resources published on the Education Bureau (EDB) website; Legal and policy documents the revised PDPO on doxxing, reports and publications by The Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong and the Legislative Council. All of these documents are available on the internet. After removing documents that were seemingly redundant in content, we conducted in-depth discourse analysis of 13 documents. The purpose of this comparative analysis is to reveal possible mismatches among young people and official understanding of the same issue (thus *addressing RQ3*). Doing so eventually facilitates more accurate and informed policy development in the future, thus *addressing RQ4*.

Type	Number of documents collected
Government and PCPD publications	53
Legal and Policy documents	24

Table 2: Summary of Policy Documents Collected

Data Processing, Coding, and Analysis

Overall, the analysis triangulated multiple data sources to understand a particular theme from multiple perspectives. The *online questionnaire* data were analyzed by the full-time Research Assistant who helped generate descriptive statistics of the survey results. The purpose of the questionnaire findings is, (i) to gain general insights into the participants' experience, perceptions, and attitudes of doxxing; (ii) to identify suitable participants for Phase 2 of the study; and (iii) to complement and contextualize the results of the qualitative discourse analysis in subsequent phases of the study.

The core part of the study was informed by *discourse analysis of textual data* from the forum, interviews, and institutional documents. The textual data in the project were analyzed from both micro- and macro- perspectives. Following the triangulation procedures

of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999), three dimensions of the data were analyzed, including *content*, *discursive strategies*, and *linguistic realization*. To analyze the linguistic devices used in producing doxxing, micro-linguistic features were identified. Focal units of analysis include specific word choices and expressions, especially those linguistic strategies identified in previous research on online aggressive language, such as metaphors and dehumanization (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017). To understand the participants' attitudes and perceptions of doxxing, the interview data were first coded through a grounded theory approach to allow themes to emerge as data analysis progresses. Other themes and the interpretation of them were informed by findings in previous research on aggressive language online such as trolling discourse in Hardaker (2013) and hate speech in Assimakopoulos et al. (2017) and Baider & Constantinou (2020). Concepts developed in CDA (e.g. justification, naturalization, legitimation, and framing) were also used to interpret the discourse strategies manifested in the online comments, interviews, institutional documents. The discourse analysis was also situated within the broader socio-historical background of Hong Kong to uncover the ideologies that shape the participants' perceptions and attitudes. The coding scheme was drafted and constantly revised by all members of the project team. See Appendix 1 for the full coding matrix.

Zoom recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by a student assistant. All the interview transcripts, media reports, and the documents in Table 2 were imported to the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA to create a database of analyzable texts. The coding and analysis of textual and interview data were also performed on MAXQDA to identify recurrent themes across multiple data sources. Coding was initially performed by the full-time research assistant, followed by second coding by the PI, to ensure accuracy of coding.

Research Results and Discussion

Varying definitions and interpretations of 'doxxing'

Among the 500 survey respondents, most of them reported to have had some exposure to doxxing in their everyday lives, including being doxxed targets. 79% of them reported to have witnessed people they do not know being doxxed online, 33% have witnessed people they know doxxed, and 11% have been doxxed themselves. However, we found that they did not share the same understanding of the meaning of doxxing.

When presented with a general definition of doxxing “「起底」指未經他人同意披露其個人資料”, 92% of the respondents agreed in different degrees that doxxing refers to the disclosure of others' personal information without their consent. Although there is a general consensus that doxxing refers to unauthorized disclosure of others' personal data, a minority (8%) of respondents disagreed with this definition (Figure 1).

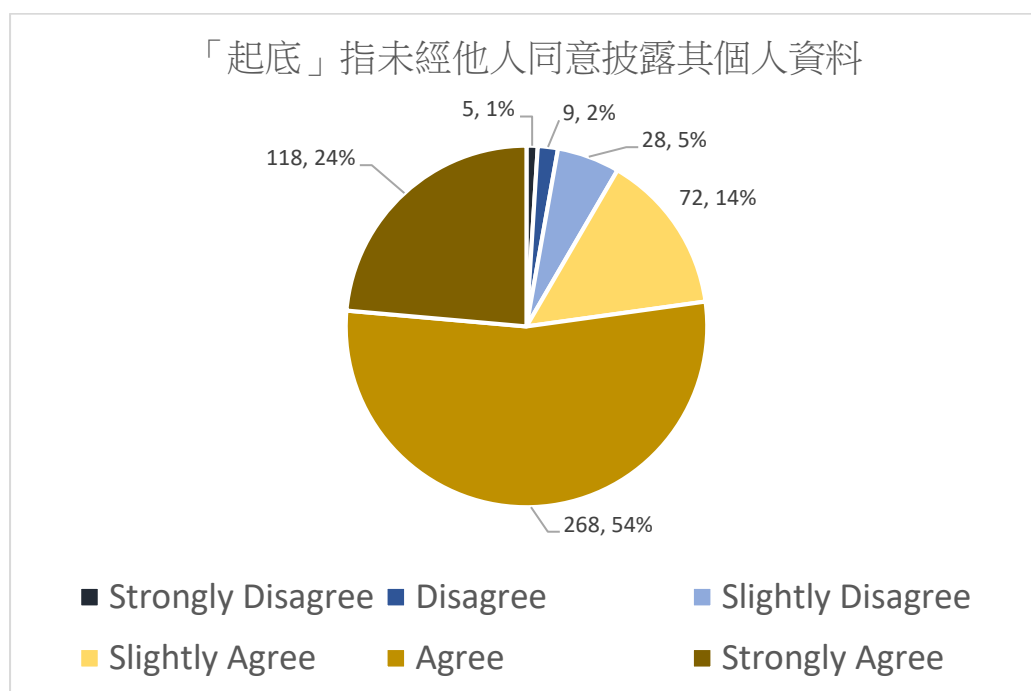


Figure 1

When it comes to what constitutes doxxing, the participants had varying interpretations, especially regarding the type of information disclosed and the inclusion of an intent to harm. 78% of the respondents agreed in varying degrees that it is not doxxing if the disclosed personal information is publicly accessible (e.g. searchable on the internet, available in public

registers), while 22% of them saw the disclosure of publicly searchable information a form of doxxing (Figure 2).

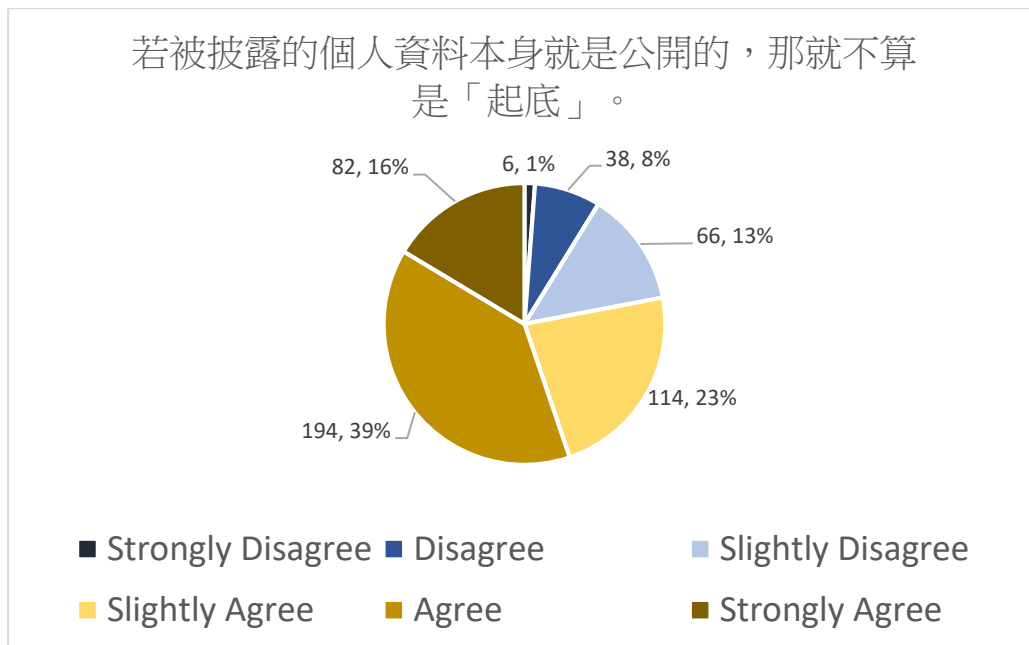


Figure 2

According to the PCPD, reposting doxxing messages without data owner's consent also constitutes doxxing. However, only 69% of the respondents agreed in different degrees that re-posting or forwarding messages with others' personal information without their consent is also a form of doxxing.

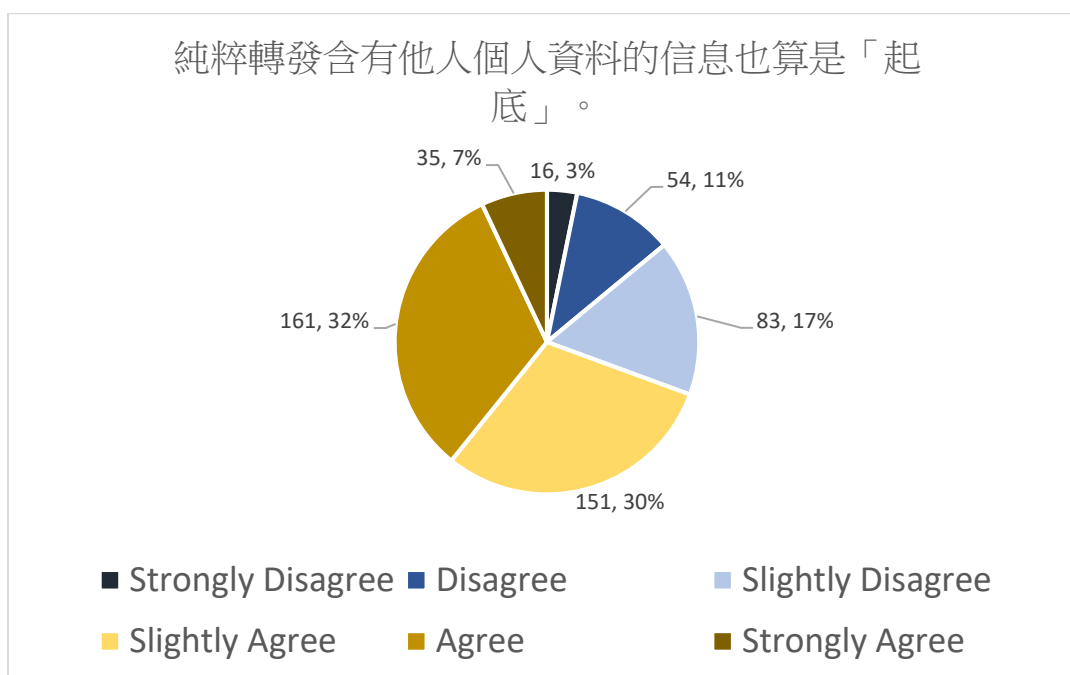


Figure 3

The respondents shared divided opinions on whether doxxing must include an intention to harm. 45% of them agreed to varying degrees that having an intent to harm was a prerequisite to doxxing while the other 55% of the respondents did not agree that there must be an intention to harm for doxxing to happen (Figure 4).

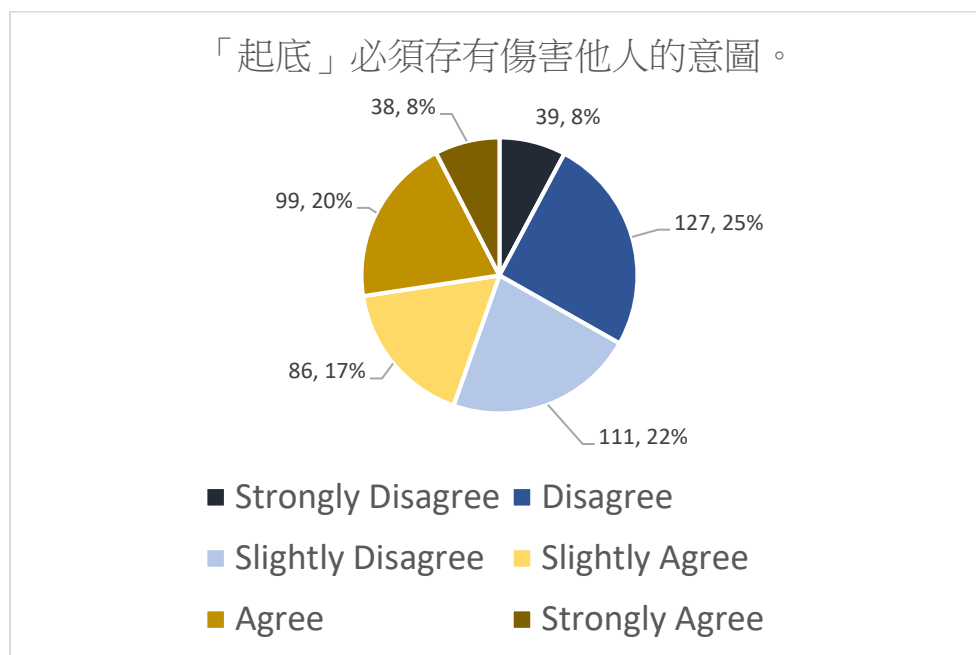


Figure 4

This initial part of the survey findings has demonstrated that, despite the relatively high education level of the 500 participants, they did not share the same degree of awareness and knowledge of doxxing and its law. Notably, many participants were ignorant or uncertain of what types of content could be legally disclosed and the conditions under which the sharing of content would constitute doxxing. These are the areas which we believe deserve more attention in the process of implementing doxxing-related policies. Some participants even expressed uncertainties of the specific legal expressions used in the law, as will be shown in the qualitative discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis of forum posts and interview data reveals that online participants and young people adopt the discourse strategy of *(re-)definition* to justify and legitimize doxxing. (Re-)definition is a ‘theoretical legitimation’ strategy where actions are legitimized not in terms of purposes and effectiveness, but through defining an action in terms of ‘another,

moralized activity’ (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 103). By representing doxxed targets’ behavior as a threat, source of harm to the public, unequal power relation, doxxing is redefined as a normal and legitimate online practice in the interest of the public. We have identified three major discourse strategies that redefine and justify doxxing in the data, with frequencies and examples outlined in Table 3:

- (i) *Normalization*: This discourse strategy frames ideologies and social practices as normal and commonplace, thus attributing what would have been unacceptable behavior more neutral quality (see Rheindorf, 2019). In the data, expressions such as ‘inevitable’ are ‘normal’ are often used to legitimize doxxing.
- (ii) *Blame shifting*: This refers to the strategy where participants shift the responsibility to doxxed targets as the ones who first disclosed their own personal information online (see Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016).
- (iii) *Negative-other construction*: This refers to the attribution of negative qualities to doxxed targets, thus constructing them as deserving to be doxxed. For example, participants may take up the linguistic device of *dehumanization* to describe doxxed targets such as “dog” and “locust”. Dehumanization is common in hate speech that serves to separate in-group from out-group. This strategy also enacts ‘moral disengagement’ (Bandura, 2011) that legitimizes potentially controversial actions such as doxxing.

Discourse strategy and description	Example	Frequency
<i>Normalization</i>	不是網民的專利， <u>很多</u> 機構（包括政府機構如秘密警察）都可起底 在資訊科技過於發達的環境下，這件事 <u>很難避免</u> 我覺得起埋佢身邊嘅人都 <u>好正常</u>	111
<i>Blame shifting</i>	起底無問題，只係 <u>上網唔小心</u> <u>自己公</u> 開係 FB 唔係公開比人睇？	110
<i>Negative-other construction</i>	佢老公好似係[...] <u>黑社會</u> 保險 <u>狗</u>	187

Table 3: The three most frequently occurring discourse strategies that justify doxxing

Interpreting Keywords the Doxxing Law

When it comes to the new amendments in the PDPO, only 33% of the survey participants were aware of the criminalization of doxxing in Hong Kong (Figure 5).

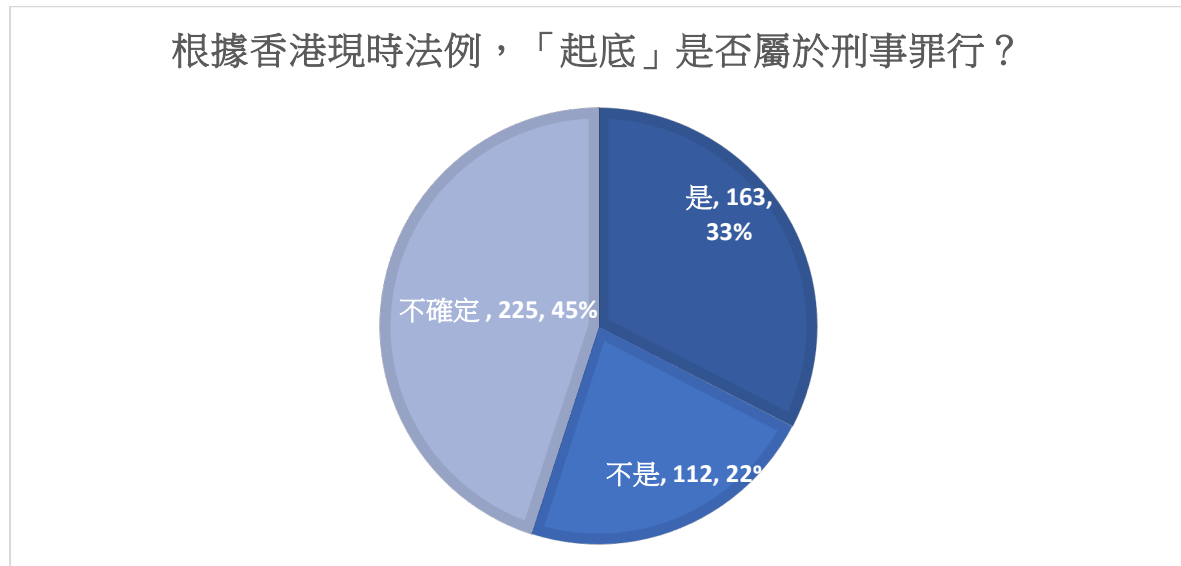


Figure 5

The respondents were also asked to rate the clarity of the legal description of doxxing available on the PCPD website. Only 45% of the respondents found the definition of doxxing related criminal offenses to be clear or somewhat clear (Figure 6). It is also noted that respondents who browsed and posted on LIHKG more frequently (i.e. several times per day) were less likely to find the definition clear. When asked the reasons why the doxxing law might be inaccessible to the general public, three major factors emerged – that the description of the offence is too long, the words in the law are too technical, or the law lacks substantial examples to illustrate what constitutes doxxing (or not) (Figure 7).

你認為以下對「起底」罪行的描述有多清晰?

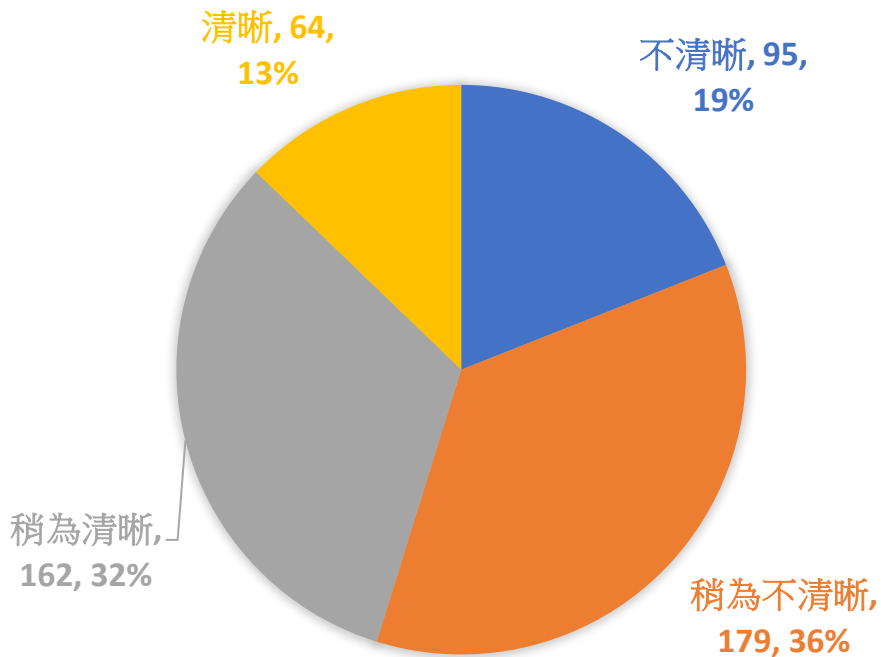


Figure 6

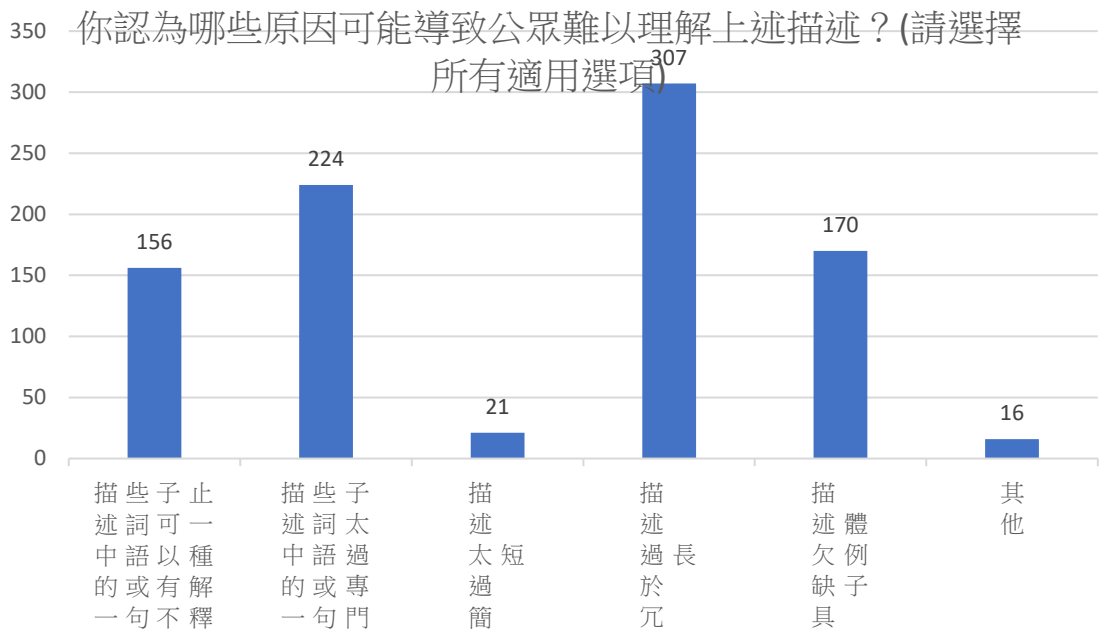


Figure 7

With this background information in mind, we coded and analyzed major themes in the interviews to understand participants' perceptions of doxxing and its related legal documents. In general, the participants held varying interpretations of certain expressions in the legal definitions. Four keywords in the doxxing law were identified as being interpreted differently by officials and the participants.

Keyword 1: Personal Data 個人資料

According to the doxxing law, doxxing includes the act of gathering someone else's information and publicizing it online with potentially harmful consequences. As shown in Figure 2, however, most of the respondents did not think gathering publicly available information would constitute doxxing. In other words, to them, the act of looking up information such as personal details in public registers and publicize them is not illegal. Such information was seen as inherently 'public' by the participants. This implies that the respondents were also uncertain of what constitutes privacy and 'personal data' in the new doxxing law. According to the PCPD, the term "personal data" 個人資料 refers to:

Personal Data means information which relates to a living individual and can be used to identify that individual. It must also exist in a form which access to or processing of is practicable.

(Chinese: 個人資料是指與一名在世人士有關及可確定個人身份的資料，亦必須以可供查閱及處理的方式記錄下來。)

However, our interviewees were unsure about what constitutes 'illegal disclosure' of personal data in the context of doxxing. Certain participants seemed to have a much narrower view of personal data compared to PCPD's broad definition where any accessible or processible information that identifies an individual would become personal data. Searchable information was interpreted by interviewees as being made public initially, and willingly, by the data owner. As a result, as illustrated in the following quotes, they believed that publishing such data online should not be treated as doxxing.

- 個重點係自己公開自己既資料經已變成公開資料 D 人鐘意點用都得。同選舉事務處唔見左有全香港人既個人資料既電腦係完全唔同。[...]連登仔所整理既資料其實真係無乜特別
- 已經講明係轉載一個屬於公開嘅資料嘅嘢，即係例如 forward 人哋嗰個 IG profile，或者 Facebook 某條 link，咁其實呢個已經係公開嘅，咁即係個

post 係每個人都可以 access 嘅 information。咁你將呢一個 information 話畀人聽，唔通咁樣都叫做起底咩。

Some participants also expressed uncertainties as to what types of information would qualify personal data. Car plate number is something that they regularly mentioned as a controversial category of personal data. Some interviewees argued that a car plate number is meant to identify a car, rather than the car owner. Some of these findings suggest that participants believed that only publishing ‘private’ personal information should qualify as doxxing. There was some confusion between the terms ‘personal’ and ‘private’ information.

- 咁如果係呢一個 situation，我覺得唔算係 expose 咗一個人嘅個人資料，因為車牌就算我唔擺上網，佢揸住架車過街行，咁其實人人都見到㗎喇，所以佢唔算係一個起底。
- 車牌算唔算個人資料呢，我係有保留嘅。

Keyword 2: Intent 意圖

According to the new amendments to the PDPO, doxxing becomes an offence when someone publishes others’ personal data with “an intent to cause any specified harm”. The PDPO does not explain the legal meaning of intent or how it is measured. Some interviewees found the word ‘intent’ problematic as it was unclear to them how intent was assessed. Some participants were also worried that intent could be easily misinterpreted by subjective judgements. Concerns were also expressed over the boundary between acceptable and illegal intent, and how that would impact those who might unintentionally disclose others’ data due to ignorance of the law, as shown in the following quotes.

- 點為之係有意圖咁樣起人底，點樣有意圖地公開人哋資料，佢冇講清楚。犯法嗰條線佢冇喺度定清楚。
- 不知者不罪

Interviewees also had varying opinions on whether jocular comments on doxxing-related posts, or what Dynel (2021) refers to as ‘jocular insults’, would be judged as malicious intent that bears legal consequences, as illustrated in the following interview data:

- 我諗到一個例子就係可能有啲人講笑佢 post 咗一個 video 上去，即係淨係想畀人笑下又好或者畀人欣賞都好，之後嗰個 post 下面就慢慢發展到係想起嗰個人嘅底 同埋想識呢個人，無論係 positive comment 又好或者 negative comment 又好，咁係之後嗰啲人定係本身 post 嗰條片個人係起底呢？

- 就算佢淨係想擺出嚟笑下。咁但係你真係擺咗人咁個 IG 出嚟，你真係畀咗人咁可能唔係好願意畀大家知嘅 information 出嚟，係囉所以就算你變成乜嘢 form 都好，佢本身都係起咗人底。

Both the LIHKG and interview data show that a complex nexus of motivations may trigger doxxing behavior, and harm is not always intended. Theories of pragmatics suggest that intentions and motivations cannot be easily proved, and they vary across contexts. Similar to face-to-face communication, speakers' intention in online communication, especially in an asynchronous one-to-many environment like LIHKG, is not always consciously considered by the hearers in the process of meaning making (see Dynel, 2021: 30). The reader's uptake may diverge from the writer's intention.

Keyword 3: Specified Harm 指明傷害

Another keyword in the PDPO that seemed to confuse the participants was 'specified harm', or just 'harm' itself. In the ordinance, 'specified harm' is defined as:

Pursuant to section 64(6) of the Ordinance, "specified harm" contains four categories, including harassment, molestation, pestering, threat or intimidation to the relevant person; bodily harm or psychological harm to that person; harm causing that person reasonably to be concerned for that person's safety or well-being; or damage to the property of the person³

(Chinese)根據條例第 64(6)條，「指明傷害」共包含四個範疇，包括對資料當事人或其家人(下稱「該人」)的滋擾、威脅或恐嚇；對該人的身體傷害或心理傷害；導致該人合理地擔心其安全或福祉的傷害；或該人的財產受損。

Similar to 'intent', participants found the term 'harm' vague and could be prone to subjective interpretation. They also expressed concerns as to how harm is proved.

- 不清晰「指明傷害」的定義及意思
- 「傷害」一詞過於含糊
- 即係就算你搵一個例如一個心理學方面嘅 professional 去 evaluate 當事人究竟有冇受到啲咩指明傷害，呢啲都係一啲好主觀嘅嘢囉我覺得，所以就會比較難去喺法庭上面大家講
- 但係我又會諗到呢啲係點樣證明，尤其呢啲係 intangible 嘅嘢呢，咁 prosecution 嘅時候究竟係點樣去證明的一件事，呢個我都覺得有啲存疑有啲值得商榷嘅位。即係擔心呢啲係好 emotional，好主觀嘅 perception，咁我就覺得雖然係清楚咗，但我覺得要證明傷害都係有一定難度。

³ https://www.pcpd.org.hk/english/resources_centre/publications/forms/files/OPS004_e.pdf

Keyword 4: Public Interest 公眾利益

Of particular interest to this project is how the expression ‘public interest’ is taken up by both the government and the participants to defend the doxxing law and legitimize doxxing respectively.

From the perspective of the government, ‘public interest’ is framed as a reason to criminalize doxxing, with the belief that it is in the interest of the public to have their privacy protected and punish doxxers. It is noteworthy that official discussion of the criminalization of the doxxing law was largely triggered by doxxing of police officers and their family during the 2019-20 social unrest, although doxxing had existed in Hong Kong for a long time. In a blog post reiterating the importance of complying with injunction orders against doxxing of police officers and family, the Secretary of Justice, referring to herself as the “guardian of public interest”, wrote:

The Court of First Instance in a recent judgment sets out the principle that criminal contempt is engaged when there is serious interference with the due administration of justice, adding that offenders are punished **for the sake of public interest**. [...] The **immense public interest** involved in protecting the due administration of justice as an integral component of the rule of law ordinarily calls for a deterrent sentence on the contemnor.⁴

On the contrary, to the young people in our study, doxxing can be legitimized in the name of public interest as well. This perception of doxxing echoes Anderson and Wood’s (2021: 209) definition of ‘public interesting doxxing’, which is

motivated by a belief that the release of personally identifiable or proprietary information will promote the welfare or well-being of the general public ... Public interest doxxing may take numerous forms, including as a mechanism for holding governments, institutions, and public figures accountable, as well as a mechanism for issuing public safety announcements through, for example, releasing personally identifiable information about predatory Tinder dates.

In the LIHKG data, bystander netizens often use the verb 推, a common forum expression to mean promoting a post or comment to increase its visibility (as in 推下等多d人知), implying their belief in spreading doxxed information for the sake of public interest. Participants in the interviews also considered public interest doxxing acceptable. They

⁴ Source: https://www.doj.gov.hk/en/community_engagement/sj_blog/20210328_blog1.html

believed that netizens have the power to exercise public interest doxxing, which is comparable to journalistic doxxing of individuals, as in the following quote:.

如果佢為咗啲 public interest 或者去行使佢嘅第四權去做一啲嘢嘅話，我自己諗嘅就係我解嘅起底未必一定係罪行

In supporting public interest doxxing, some interviewees positively evaluated doxxing as serving the following purposes:

- (i) *Upholding social justice and promoting moral behavior*: The expression “伸張正義” was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews as a positive outcome of online doxxing. It is noteworthy that the term ‘justice’ is once again an ambiguous one in this study. To the participants, justice is performed informally by way of digital vigilantism, beyond the formal legal system. To them, such informal, mediated, justice is necessary when the perceived wrongdoing of the target is considered by many as unacceptable but not immediately illegal, such as poor customer service at a restaurant. It is also believed that, online doxxing and shaming deviant actions potentially “promotes moral behavior, i.e., behavior that fosters cooperative behavior.” (Blitvich, 2022: 62). As an interviewee said,
- 有時有啲法律做唔到嘅，我哋就要透過社會輿論去所謂制裁佢，例如有啲人佢可能真係做咗啲好唔道德嘅嘢，涉及公眾利益架嘞，係一啲大家都好睇唔過眼嘅事。
 - 動機係良性嘅，即係所謂係想警惡懲奸，伸張正義啦，我覺得係好嘅件事
 - 我自己本身都覺得起底係一個好中性嘅詞語，佢唔係帶有負面嘅嘢。因為有時候睇到連登嘅起底情況，之後佢哋可能覺得嗰個人唔好，想用另類嘅方式去伸張正義，所以先至去做呢一個起底嘅事情。但對於起底係咪一樣好 negative 嘅嘢，我又好保留。

By contrast, justice is represented by the government with a more top-down narrative. To the government, justice can only be sought through a top-down legal process, and civilians have no power to undertake law enforcement in their own hands. The Department of Justice states clearly on their website that “the pursuit of democracy, universal suffrage, social justice or any other noble cause cannot and should not be used as a justification to act in any way which would erode the rule of law”. Similar to public interest, social justice is an ambiguous and contested concept charged with ideologies.

(ii) *Doxxing as deterrent*: Participants also believed that doxxing can deter others from engaging in similar behavior, as illustrated by the following quotes.

- 咁個網民可能淨係想叫人哋小心啲個人，叫啲人唔好 **approach** 呢個人，咁我哋淨係 **base on** 啲咁少嘅資料，咁呢個人可能都淨係想伸張正義姐，叫啲人小心啲啫。
- 例如可能我見過畀人性騷擾嘅人公開咗少少個個性騷擾這個資料，咁可能係呢啲情況下個想公開佢個人資料嘅人唔係特登意圖令佢有傷害，即係佢唔係特登想佢受傷害嘅，係用啲資訊警惕人，講番件事出嚟，即係類似尋求番個公義咁樣。

Assisting formal investigation: Participants also believed that information exposed through doxxing could become ‘evidence’ in formal investigations. This echoes the function of the so-called Human Flesh Search Engine in Mainland China, an online collective action with the common goal of hunting down a target individual’s demographic and geographic information to punish their deviant behaviors (Blitvich, 2022; Cheong & Gong, 2010; Gao, 2016). Such deviant or unacceptable behaviors include “people who abuse animals, teenagers who do not respect their elders, wealthy children who do not care about the feelings of others, and the behavior of corrupt officials.” Many of these led to the targets begin arrested or sacked. In these cases, even if ‘harm’ is caused, the participants believed that such harm serves as informal punishment to perceived unacceptable behavior.

- 正正係因為啲網民起咗底，令到佢可以變成一個證據去用一個司法嘅方式，可以用虐貓呢一條罪行嚟鋤個虐貓者。
- 譬如果有啲人話起佢底啦，要搵一啲證據去告佢咁樣，我覺得呢啲都ok嘅，

Ambivalence: Participants’ Self-Reflection

In understanding participants’ perceptions and attitudes towards doxxing and its consequences, we asked the them to reflect on the acceptability of doxxing cases, using their survey responses for Question 8 as prompts. One salient finding is that many participants demonstrated ambivalent attitudes towards doxxing. Notably, doxxing was positively and negatively evaluated simultaneously by the interviewees: they employed justification and framing strategies to positively evaluate doxxing as a justice-seeking tool and as a deterrent to others; at the same time, participants were found to reposition doxxed targets as victims experiencing harm, thus considering doxxing as a transgressive or immoral practice.

Participants also pointed to the contextual nature of doxxing, stressing that doxxing could be ‘acceptable’ under certain circumstances and motives. Such ambivalence results in uncertainty and confusion about the moral and legal implications of doxxing, as shown in the following quotes:.

- 即係有陣時你唔可以否認佢係真係 acceptable，但其實都好睇你起底嘅 motives 係啲咩，用一個咩嘅心態，咩目的去做。所以我覺得佢比較係一個 moral issue。
- 我理性上覺得 所有人嘅私隱係要尊重，但我覺得有啲人係值得畀人睇 law 以外去私人制裁佢
- 因為其實我覺得我會好 resonate 到被起底嘅人，但你話我支唔支持起底呢回事，我係支持。
- 即起底好似一個唔好嘅行為啦，咁但係其實我都好開心喎，即係佢係咪一件錯嘅事呢，呢個係咪一個人性嘅黑面。
- 佢 present 出嚟好似好衰咁，個刻就可能我想鬧佢，但係就盡量自己.....係需要啲時候大家都唔好一齊去話佢，我都驚會造成傷害咁樣，因為之前都睇得太多呢啲新聞。但同時我都覺得，反面咁樣睇如果我哋完全冇呢啲咁樣嘅起底行為，而佢係真係做咗呢啲嘢嘍，我哋選擇唔去起佢底，咁咪好似警唔到世咁，所以我都有唔同睇法，兩面咁。

Despite being informed the legal consequences (whether before or after participating in the study), participants’ inability to make a stable decision between the perceived positive and negative impact of doxxing suggests that the act of doxxing is a double-edged sword. This finding resonates Chang and Leung (2015) argument, in that human flesh search engine in China on one hand punishes unacceptable behaviors and maintains social justice; on the other hand, it potentially damages victims’ reputation and even their lives.

Finally, a finding that is noteworthy, and quite unexpected, is that a number of the interviewees explicitly referred to how the interview prompted their critical self-reflection of issues that they had never thought about before participating in our study.

- 其實我對於起底真係零了解，...所以都有特別去諗起底啱唔啱或者背後有啲咩嘢，去到 focus group 嘅時候先至知原來其他同學係咁諗㗎，我都有諗過添，去到深少少就係 individual interview 㗎啦，[...] 即係都會發現自己原來有啲地方係矛盾咗嘅咁樣，咁所以好唔同嘅一個點就係原來有啲日常生活中好似好好玩好咩嘅，唔需要特別關注嘅點都好值得關注。
- 參與之前我係有咁多迫自己嘅 critical thinking，我比較係自己主觀地理解自己係唔鍾意呢件事。但係參與咗之後我會覺得有啲位係你要 reckon 佢起底真係有用。
- 但係我會出咗好多疑問囉做完個 focus group interview 之後，例如頭先咁樣都問咗好多關於起底嘅嘢，我都會有疑問，都會有好多唔同嘅問號，因為如果

你話係 post 片呀呢啲咁嘅行為，其實好多人都有做過，咁都有機會係起底。我自己都睇過好多人做過 post 喺街上面見到好得意嘅嘢，或者係一啲唔好嘅事，例如嘈交咁樣，然後下面就演變咗做起底咁樣，咁我就會諗其實呢啲係咪都係叫做起底呢，即係我都會有好多問題。

Summary of Key Findings

In this section, we briefly summarize the key project findings by responding to our first three research questions.

RQ1: How is doxxing defined, perceived, and justified online?

- The meaning of doxxing varies from individual to individual;
- Doxxing is commonly understood by online forum participants as a way to expose perceived wrongdoing and maintain their view of social justice. An intention to harm is not always a pre-requisite when exposing others' personal information;
- Despite the availability of an official definition, doxxing is constantly redefined and justified by netizens through various legitimation and argumentation strategies, notably , normalization, blame-shifting, and negative-other constructions.

RQ2: What are Hong Kong young people's attitudes and perceptions of doxxing?

- Most survey and interview participants did not have a clear idea about what constitutes doxxing.
- Most of them also had difficulties in understanding the legal and official definitions of doxxing.
- Many participants felt ambivalent about doxxing and its criminalization.
- Doxxing and its law were both positively and negatively evaluated.
- Such attitudinal ambivalence suggests that effective policy communication relies on understanding public's perceptions.

RQ3: How is doxxing defined and represented in legal and government contexts? In what ways are these definitions similar to or different from the perceptions identified in RQs 1 and 2?

- There is an obvious mismatch between young people's understanding of doxxing and official/legal definitions of it.
- Official definitions draw on an exclusive and narrow range of doxxing contexts, while participants draw on a much wider range of motives and contexts when describing what doxxing means.
- Official definitions may be ambiguous and confusing to the educated, informed public.

Policy Implications and recommendations

RQ4: What are the implications for the development of education policy in order to enhance young people's critical awareness towards doxxing?

When it comes to policy-making, the project makes four key recommendations, in light of the findings reported above:

Promoting legal language education

Over half of the survey respondents found the official and legal definition of doxxing on the PCPD website unclear or somewhat unclear. This lack of clarity, according to the respondents, is caused by lengthy expressions and technical jargon in the law, and the lack of illustrative examples of doxxing in the official definitions. This implies that official definitions of doxxing lack clarity and precision, even to university students, let alone the less informed public. As shown in our interview data, the participants found certain expressions in the law, notably 'personal data', 'harm', and 'intent', ambiguous, and could be prone to subjective interpretations. The LIHKG users' re-definitions and justifications of doxxing further support the need for precision in the law. In promoting the doxxing law, the government should work closely with the PCPD and be more proactive in explaining potentially ambiguous expressions: (i) provide an annotated list of common types of personal data; (ii) clarify how 'specified harm' is assessed; (iii) define 'intent' and explain how it is measured. At a more general level, we recommend the incorporation of legal language education into the formal school curriculum, such as in Liberal Studies. Legal knowledge should not be restricted to law school students. At the secondary or even primary level, common legal expressions and youth-friendly legal education should be offered progressively to better prepare young people to be informed and responsible citizens.

Better understanding of public perceptions on doxxing

An unexpected finding is that only 33% of the survey participants were aware of the criminalization of doxxing in Hong Kong. The study has also identified mismatches between official and public perceptions of doxxing and its law. More specifically, while the government uses the expression 'public interest' in support of the doxxing law, our

participants also engaged discourses of ‘public interest’ to legitimize doxxing practices. To the interviewees, not all forms of ‘doxxing’ are illegal and unacceptable. At the same time, the participants did not seem to have a clear idea of the conditions under which disclosing information is acceptable or not. Overall, the interviewees expressed ambivalent attitudes towards doxxing. To them, the act of doxxing is a double-edged sword, which can sometimes serve as a justice-seeking tool, while at other times, a transgressive practice that may cause harm to the targets. Such mismatches and ambivalence imply: (i) more publicity of doxxing and its legal implications is needed; (ii) more effective communication between the government and the public on the matter of doxxing is needed; and (iii) media literacies education on doxxing needs to be implemented. Currently, much publicity work on doxxing is done through the PCPD website, public seminars, radio API and TV API. We recommend more active engagement with social media such as Instagram and local discussion forums where doxxing takes place. The PCPD should also work closely with universities to conduct seminars and awareness enhancement activities on various kinds of online behaviors. There is also an urgent need to thoroughly understand public perceptions of the issue, as the first step to enhancing the public’s critical awareness of doxxing is to understand their current attitudes and beliefs about doxxing. This can be achieved through conducting public forums or consultation sessions with focus groups prior to and after policy implementation. The participants in the study found the self-reflection in focus group interviews particularly revealing, in that it enabled them to consider and reflect on doxxing issues in ways that they had never imagined before, thus also enhancing their critical awareness of the topic. It is recommended that critical self-reflection be introduced as an awareness promotion activity.

Recognizing the value of language-oriented research in policy development

Some interviewees expressed concerns over the word ‘intent’ in the doxxing law and how intent is assessed and interpreted in investigations of doxxing cases. Participants also pointed to the contextual nature of doxxing, stressing that doxxing could be ‘acceptable’ under certain circumstances and motives, resulting in uncertainty and confusion about the moral and legal implications of doxxing. The participants defined doxxing in terms of a much wider range of motives and intents (e.g. public interest doxxing, jocular insults, and accidental doxxing) than the official definitions and the law, which tend to focus on harmful and malicious intent. Further discourse-based research should be conducted to investigate multiple manifestations of doxxing, and the extensive range of underlying motives and conditions under which

doxxing is enacted. It is through such in-depth and systematic analysis of motives that accurate and effective policies can be developed. We recommend establishing a taskforce composed of relevant members of the government, the PCPD, and language and communication experts in the process of investigating doxxing cases. For example, tools and concepts in critical discourse analysis can help reveal hidden strategies that justify doxxing, whereas theories of pragmatics can inform a more systematic analysis of intention and motives.

Encouraging interdisciplinary research on doxxing and other online behaviors

This project has demonstrated the relevance of language and discourse language in public policy development. The findings suggest that language plays a critical role in initiating, sustaining, and justifying doxxing. Despite increasing academic attention from legal and behavioral research, very little has been done from a linguistic perspective. We recommend that the government continue to provide funding support to interdisciplinary research, involving legal specialists, linguists, and psychologists, that probes into multifaceted nature of online behaviors.

Limitations of the study and directions for future research

This small-scale, 15-month exploratory study of the discourses of doxxing is not without limitations, which also open up opportunities for future research.

First, this study involved exclusively university students as our participants. While we believe this population is representative of active users of LIHKG, we have treated the participants as a relatively homogenous group. More ethnographic work needs to be done to better understand the association between the participants' characteristics and their attitudes and perceptions towards doxxing. A more comprehensive understanding of the general public's opinions about doxxing practices should help accurately inform public policy on this online behavior. We hope that our study serves as important groundwork for future studies that involve a wider demographic of participants.

Second, the discourse analysis of the LIHKG forum focused largely on the written text. As we analyzed the LIHKG data, it became clear that forum users also relied heavily on images alongside their textual interaction when engaging in doxxing-related discussions. Future discourse-based research on doxxing should foreground the role of images and other communication modes in doxxing practices.

Thirdly, due to COVID-19 restrictions, there were limited opportunities for in-person public dissemination activities. We hope to work closely with NGOs in the future to organize awareness enhancement activities.

Conclusion

Doxxing is a highly complex, multifaceted, and contextual social phenomenon.

Understanding it requires interdisciplinary effort to offer a holistic investigation of the issue from multiple perspectives. We have learned from the findings that legislation alone cannot prevent doxxing. Similar to hate speech, tackling doxxing is “an endeavor that can only be accomplished by encouraging collaboration and constructive dialogue” (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017) between different areas of expertise and stakeholders. This project has offered an additional dimension to existing research that focuses on the behavioral nature of doxxing. We have shown that doxxing is always framed and constructed through everyday language and discourse, which in turn shapes people’s understanding of it. What doxxing means to the public is dependent upon how it is talked about in society.

In closing, we hope to have demonstrated that language and communication researchers have a crucial role to play in online behavior research. One area on which language scholars can shed light is the relationship between intention and interpretation of doxxing. This is especially important when ‘intent’ becomes a determining factor in the legal definition of doxxing. Although in reality, intention is hard to prove, a systematic analysis of the pragmatic conditions under which speech acts are harmful or not can help distinguish between intentional and unintentional doxxing, thus also safeguarding freedom of expression online and offline (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017). In this regard, more accurate and effective policy making can only be achieved by involving researchers from different areas of expertise in policy decisions. We hope this study serves as groundwork for future studies of other common online practices.

Research Outputs and Deliverables

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)	Title	Name of Publication	Type of Publication
15/07/2022	(De-)legitimizing doxxing through discourse of altruism	Sociolinguistics Symposium 24	Conference presentation
14/05/2022	Hong Kong's doxxing law is in place, but do residents understand it?	<i>South China Morning Post</i> https://www.scmp.com/comment/letters/article/3177456/hong-kongs-doxxing-law-place-do-residents-understand-it	Commentary
(In preparation)	Mediated justice or immoral act? Discourse of ambivalence about doxxing	<i>Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict</i>	Journal article

Date (DD/MM/YYYY)	Name of Activity	Type of Activity	Information Disseminated, Format and Methods of Dissemination	Users/Audience	Expected Outcomes of Public Dissemination
13/08/2022	從語言角度看 網絡公審	Online Lecture via Zoom	This presentation introduces the phenomena of 'internet judges' and doxxing in Hong Kong. It also presented key findings of the project, including linguistic ambiguities in the doxxing law. Link to zoom lecture recording: https://cuhk.zoom.us/rec/share/dHSy4qZ4rF3-	General public	- Enhanced understanding of doxxing as a social issue; - Enhanced public awareness of doxxing offences in Hong Kong; - Enhanced awareness of ambiguities in legal discourse. Selected comments from audience:

			HsXR2Rb7B5O QFkXpHF1qkW b6lBLDI_jNFP2 89wFhCCkiKy WdUi6W.j0mp wHHoHBIP- 3sB Passcode: 8z?u.x+X		<p>“更加理解起底和語言的關係，對相關法律詳細條文的用語也有更多反思。”</p> <p>“認識到在使用網上媒體時需注意避免觸及起底的事項”</p> <p>“appreciate the talk included perspectives of various stakeholders (e.g. government, students etc)”</p>
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Objectives Achieved

Objectives	Achievement
1. To understand how online discourses surrounding doxxing enable and justify doxxing practices;	A range of key justification strategies has been identified on LIHKG.
2. To understand Hong Kong young people’s attitudes and perceptions of doxxing;	Survey and interview data have revealed participants’ ambivalent attitudes.
3. To identify possible mismatches between young people’s and institutional definitions of doxxing;	Mismatches have been identified through a comparative analysis of participants’ perceptions and official definitions of doxxing.
4. To identify policy and education needs to enhance young people’s critical awareness of doxxing.	Four policy recommendations have been made.

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Appendix 1: Coding Matrix

Code	Description
Discourse strategies	
Affective Discourse	Discursive actions that aim to provoke certain emotions
Satisfaction	Expressions or utterances that convey happiness or satisfaction from instances of doxxing. Examples: good job doxxing them, nice, haha catch me if you can
Fear	Expressions or utterances that convey fear towards targets of doxxing. Examples: they will try everything to put us in jail, they will rape and murder us for doxxing
Anger	
Foul Language	Foul languages to express anger. Examples: fuck, fuck your mom, cunt, etc.
Others	Expressions or utterances that show anger towards targets of doxxing. Examples: Black cops go eat shit
Trust/ Commitment	Utterances that convey commitment towards the act of doxxing and hence mobilize and encourage other users to join. Examples: keep this up and we can defeat the police, keeping going and we are defending democracy
Legitimation	'the process by which speakers accredit or license a type of social behavior' (Reyes, 2011, p. 782) In our case doxxing.
Rationalization	Rationalization explains action by reference to 'goals and uses' (Van Leeuwen, 2007)
Authorization	Utterances that adapt or manipulate institutional voices to legitimize doxxing.
doxxing as self defence	Utterances that frame doxxing as an act of self defence.
Re-definition - doxxing as not illegal	'theoretical legitimation' strategy where actions are legitimized not in terms of purposes and effectiveness, but through defining an action in terms of 'another, moralized activity' (Van Leeuwen, 2007, p. 103)
Intensification of threats	Threats of doxxed individuals towards the community members or the general public are intensified via stylistic choices such as hyperbole or detailed depictions of actions done by the doxxed individuals In the data, this usually takes the form of the detailed descriptions of alleged acts by cruelty by police to the general public
Self-victimization	Forum participants represent themselves as victims of police's alleged misconduct (Lee, 2020)
Negative-other construction	Forum participants attribute negative qualities to police officers (Lee, 2020)
Normalization	The act of doxxing is normalized as an act that has been around for a long time and was never a criminal offense before, or doxxing as an action

	<p>conducted by individuals with different political stances or in apolitical contexts.</p> <p>Alternatively, the distribution of ‘unprotected information’ (e.g. those from public social media accounts) is normalized</p> <p>e.g. 你放得上網就預左比人睇 比人睇就預左比人講架喇</p>
Blame attribution	
Mitigation of responsibility	This code is for replies that reduces the doxxers' responsibility by emphasizing that the personal information posted is already available in the public domain.
Total denial of responsibility	This code will be mainly used for utterances that indicates it is the police who doxxed their colleagues
Manipulation of institutional voice	Institutional voices such as legal documents or regulations are recontextualized deliberately or misunderstood and utilized to frame doxxing as not illegal
PDPO	<p>Prevalent example:</p> <p>Incorrect understanding of PDPO that doxxing conducted overseas cannot be held accountable and the government has no power to take down information stored overseas</p>
COIAO	<p>Prevalent example:</p> <p>Forum users deliberately address fellow members as “friends” when distributing doxxed information (that the COIAO is not applicable) to redefine the distribution of said materials as not illegal</p>
Others	e.g. government press conferences
Others	
Nomination/ referential	<p>Nomination: the labelling of social actors, positively or negatively, appreciatively or deprecatorily (Wodak, 2015)</p> <p>Referential: the construction of in-groups and out-groups (Wodak, 2015)</p> <p>Codes in this section are used to code instances of nomination or referential strategies employed.</p>
Dehumanization	Personals (mainly police) are represented by inhuman entities such as animals or objects
Pronouns	Prevalent examples: Use of ‘We’ pronouns and sometimes ‘牠們’
Euphemism	Prevalent examples: phrases or words that are not as negative as ‘doxxing’ are used to represent the former e.g. ‘father finding his son’
Metaphor	Prevalent examples: ‘dogs’ being used to represent the police
Forum exclusive/originated slang	<p>Online slangs that are exclusively or mainly used in the LIHKG forum</p> <p>Since these slangs themselves and the discursive strategies they represent might be hard to understand, please code them with the ‘slang’ code under ‘lexical choices’ below if you are unsure of its meaning, I will map them with other codes later</p>

On actions/ events	Used when the act of nomination or referral is used on an action or event, not a person
On persons	Used when the act of nomination or referral is used on a person
Out-group membership categorization	Examples of out-groups: the police/ the general public excluding users of the forum/ government officials
In-group membership categorization	Examples of in-groups: users of the forum/ the general public including users of the forum/ HongKongers in general/ pro-democratic personals
Language and stylistic choices	Codes belonging in the 'language and stylistic choices' section are used to indicate stylistic choices, but not necessarily serves as a nomination or referential strategy
Stylistic choices	
Irony	examples: ironic remarks that can be literally interpreted as praises, with the effect of making fun of the target. e.g.表揚佢地 head shot 一擊即中都唔俾
Hyperbole	Prevalent examples: exaggerated descriptions of alleged violent behaviours by the police
Other	
Lexical choices	
Emoji	
To indicate sarcastic effect	The emoji itself hints or indicates the whole reply as sarcastic
To emphasize/ accompany utterances	
Forum exclusive slang	Online slangs that are exclusively or mainly used in the LIHKG forum
Pronouns	Prevalent examples: Use of 'We' pronouns and sometimes '牠們'
Intertextuality	
Type	
Quotation	Quotation literally reproduces the anterior text (whole or part) in a later text (Vladyka, 2004).
Source	The author honors, reshapes, steals, ransacks, or plunders a source text (Vladyka, 2004). Possible examples: replies that adopts or parodies format of replies commonly found in other posts in the forum
Source	
General websites	
News websites	
Others	Prevalent example: an adaptation from the idiom '禍不及妻兒', '禍必及妻兒'
Private messages	
Instagram/ Facebook messenger	
Whatsapp/signal	
Telegram	

LHKG posts	
Social media (profiles/screen captures)	
Government policy documents	
Medium	
Hyperlink	
Image	
Direct text quotations	
Definition of doxxing	
Types of information doxxed	
Sensitive and private personal information	E.g. personal phone number, address of the individuals and/or their family members
Information in the public domain	E.g. social media posts (set to be visible for everyone or leaked into the forum by users who can view them), information readily available online (title and location/phone number of office of government officials)
Hearsay regarding the individual	Users would claim to know or have heard of the individual concerned in post and provide information regarding them
Distribution of information of an entity (human/non-human)	In some posts “doxxing” are used in the titles of posts which details information of a matter previously not very well known by users of the forum These posts do not call for fellow users to search for and disclose personal information of the entity concerned (and sometimes the entity is not a person)
The built-in function of the forum	The posts mainly serve the purpose to distribute the information inside The forum has a built-in function named “起底”, which displays an archive of posts previously created by a user and the user’s replies in other posts When the validity of statements made by a user is questioned, other users would typically call for a “doxxing” of the concerned user, in this context “doxxing” refers to the use of the said function to examine previous posts and replies made by the user to verify the statement he made e.g. when a user claims to be a female (which is the minority among users of the forum), a typical response would be a call for “doxxing” to see if the member has claimed otherwise in his previous posts and replies to verify his/her claim
A discursive act for comedic effect	“Doxxing” is framed as the disclosure of knowingly false information of members of the community for comedic effect
Disclosure of personal information of individuals	The disclosure of personal information of one or a group of individuals
Participants	
General public	
LHKG users excluded	This code is used when 'citizens' or 'netizens' are involved in instances of doxxing.
LHKG users included	This code is used when both users of lihkg and the general public are explicitly involved in instances of doxxing.
LHKG users	

Members of other disciplined services	
Police officers and family members	
Government/ government officials	
Privacy commissioner	
Media	
Others	Examples: student leaders or politicians
Recurring themes	
Policy suggestions	Policy suggestions in relation to the criminalization of doxxing mainly from students interviewed in the research.
Validity of information doxxed	Discussions in students interview that concern the validity of information exposed in instances of doxxing and its relation to the act itself.
Stigmatization of the term 'doxxing'	Discussions in students interviews about the stigmatization effect brought by the term 'doxxing' from a lexical perspective.
LIHKG culture	Discussions in student interviews that concerns the unique culture and practices within the LIHKG community in relation to doxxing.
Criminalization of doxxing	Discussions in student interviews and media coverage about the criminalization of doxxing and the related court injunction orders.
Self-reflection	Self reflections from students interviewed related to doxxing.
Shortcomings of Doxxing Law	Students' opinions on various rooms for improvement of institutional voices educating the general public about doxxing.
Lack of examples	
Too lengthy	
Too short/ brief	
Specificity of phrases/ words	
Ambiguity of phrases/ words	
Others	
Reference to other malicious acts/criminal offenses	Instances which doxxing is juxtaposed with or connected to other malicious acts or criminal offenses in media coverage, policy documents and student interviews.
Harassment	
Intimidation	
Public condemnation	
Cyberbullying	
Defamation	
Others	Examples: Molestation, incitement
Uncertainties towards doxxing	Instances which students in interviews express their uncertainty or doubts towards doxxing .
Ambivalence towards doxxing	Instances which students in interviews express ambivalence towards doxxing, acknowledging both its advantages and drawbacks.
Mismatch between illocution and perlocution	Discussions in student interviews about how instances of doxxing could present meanings different with what the initiator intended to audiences.
Intent	Discussions regarding 'intent' in doxxing in student interviews, media coverage and policy documents.
Illegal vs immoral	Discussions in student interviews about how doxxing could be illegal but moral, or vice versa.
COIAO	Discussions about the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance (COIAO) in relation to doxxing.
PDPO	Discussions or coverage on the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (PDPO) in news reporting, policy documents, posts in LIHKG and student interviews.

Harm to doxxed individuals	
'Specified harm' in institutional voice	<p>harassment, molestation, pestering, threat or intimidation to the person</p> <p>bodily harm or psychological harm to the person</p> <p>harm causing the person reasonably to be concerned for the person's safety or well-being</p> <p>damage to the property of the person</p>
Loss of competitive advantage	<p>the form of loss faced by the victim is often an economic loss of competitive advantage against other corporations (Anderson and Wood, 2021)</p> <p>In our context, this can be interpreted as the loss of tactical advantage of the police against the protestors</p>
Loss of credibility	for example, through a doxxer releasing evidence that they have engaged in willful deception or 'immoral' activity (Anderson and Wood, 2021)
Loss of legitimacy	By exposing the doxxed individual's wrongdoings, the legitimacy of their behaviour and power are lost.
Loss of obscurity	Doxing increases the subject's physical accessibility by removing the obscurity surrounding where a person lives or works. Losing this obscurity makes someone more vulnerable to physical harassment because of whom specifically she is (Douglas, 2016).
Loss of anonymity	Deanonymization makes it easier to obtain other types of identity knowledge about the subject, and so creates greater opportunities for the other types of doxing to occur (Douglas, 2016).
Gender	Discussions about the relationship between gender and doxing.
Motives of doxxing	
Disadvantaging	When the form of loss is competitive advantage through the release of proprietary information, we might term such doxing disadvantaging doxing (Anderson and Wood, 2021)
Unintentional	Unintentional doxing is not undertaken with malicious intent but rather results from carelessness or negligence on the part of the perpetrator (Anderson and Wood, 2021)
Public interest	Public interest doxing is motivated by a belief that the release of personally identifiable or proprietary information will promote the welfare or well-being of the general public (see Cheung, this volume). Public interest doxing may take numerous forms, including as a mechanism for holding governments, institutions, and public figures accountable, as well as a mechanism for issuing public safety announcements through, for example, releasing personally identifiable information about predatory Tinder dates (Anderson and Wood, 2021).
Retribution	Retribution doxing is doxing motivated specifically by a desire to "punish" an individual. As detailed in the studies discussed below, retribution doxing may represent a technique of targeted harassment employed against individuals holding opposing political views. However, it may also take the form of informal justice-seeking actions (see Salter, 2013; Wood, Rose, & Thompson, 2019), wherein victims of crime seek justice beyond the formal justice system through publishing personally identifiable information online about their perpetrator's actions. (Anderson and Wood, 2021)
Others	
Public interest	Replies in LIHKG that justifies doxing (not necessary towards police) by stating potential misconducts by people which doxing can expose.

Social justice

This code also includes discussions regarding various aspects of public interest such as the freedom of speech and right to know in media reportings, policy documents and student interviews.

Discussions in LIHKG posts and student interviews about the notion of 'justice' in relation to doxxing.