Reinterpreting Symbolic Elements of Vandalism: A Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

When it comes to vandalism, symbolic language and other artistic forms can be interpreted in a variety of ways since they conveyed a variety of signals about the thoughts, inner feelings, and goals of young people. The study makes use of both thematic and psycholinguistic analysis techniques. Students from both private and public schools were asked to participate in the survey. According to the findings, vandalism might be motivated psychologically by malicious avarice, the desire to draw attention to a certain circumstance, a political ideology, the desire for vengeance against a specific person, group of people, or organization, impatience, or misplaced playfulness. It is a medium or channel via which pupils can relieve boredom and tension while also gaining acknowledgment for their artistic abilities. Consequently, schools are encouraged to provide activities that will assist students in diverting their focus away from wrong things on the walls, benches and chairs and other such items and towards academic topics at the school.

Keyword: symbolic elements, vandalism, psychological perspective, stylistic feature, language

Introduction

Vandalism is an artistic manifestation of one's own identity. It is the students' voice that communicates messages about real-life situations that concern them, as well as revealing their psychological, social, and academic well-being. In short, vandalism may provide a window into the lives of students and a means of determining their overall well-being. It is simply the students' way to tell their stories, highlight a certain moment in time where things went wrong or right, describe people, politics, culture, art, places, and society together; express themselves anonymously, or just be another art form.

Psychologically, vandalism may be motivated by malicious greed, by the wish to draw attention to a particular condition, by a political ideology, by the desire for revenge on a particular person, group of persons, or organization, by frustration, or by misguided playfulness. It is the students' medium or channel to relieve boredom and stress, and gain recognition for their artistic talents.

Vandalism in the form of symbolic language and other creative forms might be understood in a variety of ways since they expressed a variety of messages about the thoughts, inner sentiments, and aspirations of the youth. The spontaneity with which they are expressed through graffiti is a more liberating manner and a better means to hear kids' inner voices because it is done in a less controlled and casual context. This was in contrast to the voices of students who have been revealed in the school organ, speeches, and other places, which may have been edited to avoid being punished, criticized or experience unfavorable interpersonal relationships in the school.

The voices of students expressed in the school organ, speeches, and other forums, on the other hand, may be improved, altered or presented in a subtle manner for fear of repercussions, censure, and a breakdown of healthy interpersonal

relationships in the school environment. Thus, this study emanates.

Statement of the Problem

1. What are the characteristics of the school vandalism in Tuguegarao City in terms of:
    1.1. language choice
    1.2 stylistic features

Research Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology that was utilized in the conduct of the study. It included the research design, locale of the study, respondents and sampling procedures, research instruments, data gathering procedures and data analysis.

Research Design

This study on the interpretation of school vandalism used the qualitative method of research. The approach used were thematic and textual analysis. Moreover, other issues surrounding vandalism culture such as the reasons for performing it, characteristics of vandalism their lived-experiences in doing it and the recommended solutions to eradicate or minimize it were investigated. In exploring these issues, a documentation of these school vandalism was done.

The study was conducted in Tuguegarao City. Three (3) public high schools and three (3) private high schools were used in the study. The three public schools included Linao National High School, Cataggaman National High School and Gosi National High School. On the other hand, the private schools were University of Saint Louis of Tuguegarao, University of Cagayan Valley and John Wesley College. The identification of these respondent institutions was based on the long tradition of high school, which they have established and offered for many years.

The respondents of the study were students who have record of vandalism in their schools. The identification of these respondents were taken from the Guidance Office (public schools) and Prefect of Discipline (private schools) as it keeps records of students' files for

this purpose. The total population of the respondents was 90 for the last four years. Purposive sampling and snowball technique were used in the study and the criteria for selection were as follows: (1). They are still studying in the school at the time of the study; (2.) They had a record of performing vandalism in the school; (3.) They had done vandalism for the span of four years in the school where they enrolled.

The study used an interview guide as the primary data gathering instrument. The interview guide. The first part determined the characteristics of vandalism and social messages expressed in the vandalism. Another interest that the instrument investigated were the characterization of the school vandalism in terms of language choice and stylistic features of the vandalism. Pictures of the vandalism was also made as a way of documenting the vandalism made in all the schools.

An interview with the students either through individual interview or Focused Group Discussion (FGD) was done upon appointment with the student vandals. The interview was done in the school place of the researcher as they were invited. Also, pictures and videos were taken from the different vandalized places or things of the school. The same was done during the interview for proper documentation.

Data Analysis

Considering that all data were qualitative in nature, textual and thematic analysis was performed. The textual analysis was done in three (3) stages: One, analysis of the rhetorical context or determination of the characteristics of the vandals. In this stage, a simple profiling of the vandals, their intended audience, and the motives or reasons of the vandals to write were made and looked into. Second, analysis of the textual features of vandalism. This stage required understanding of the vandal's interpretation of the text or symbol of his/her vandalism, his/her major claim about it, and the message he/she wanted to communicate to his/her target audience. Third, placing the text in a new context. This stage suggested analyzing the common themes that were found in the vandalism and determining

how the text relates to the personal, academic and social lived experiences of the vandals. Relating this with their lived experiences served as the basis for obtaining solutions or remedies for vandalism and the educational implications of the vandalism culture in the schools.

Finally, topics were arranged as follows: (1) Profile of the respondents; (2.) Reasons for performing vandalism; 3) Characteristics of school vandalism.

Discussion of Results and Findings
Characteristics of School Vandalism

According to Johnson (2005,) schools are prime targets for vandalism for a number of reasons. First, they have high concentrations of potential offenders in high-risk age groups. Second, they are easily accessible. Third, they are symbols of social order and middle-class values. Fourth, some youth believe that public property belongs to no one, rather than to everyone.

Of the ninety (90) vandalism collected in both private and public schools in Tuguegarao City, it was found out that there were more vandalism committed in the public rather than in private school. Seventy (70) of these vandals were documented from the public high schools while twenty (20) vandalisms were documented in the private schools. During the interview, the respondents attributed it to a more tight security measures, more rigid implementation of disciplinary rules and regulations, and the presence of a Prefect of Discipline who closely monitors the commission of vandalism in the private schools.

The presence of these factors in private schools corroborates the findings of David Corbett (2005) who revealed that some schools are much more vandal-prone than others, and Table 3. Language Choice revealed in Vandalism

repeat victimization is common. He further said that a school's attractiveness as a vandalism target may also be related to its failure to meet some students' social, educational, emotional or psychological needs in general. Moreover, students may act out to express their displeasure or frustration through vandalism. Corbett (2005) further asserted that schools with either an oppressive or a hands-off administrative style, or those characterized as impersonal, unresponsive, and non-participatory, suffer from higher levels of vandalism and break-ins.

Inasmuch as the study sought to characterize school vandalism, this part of the paper presented this concept. It has to be understood that the pre-requisite to the textual analysis of the school vandalism is to characterize them into language choice, placement of vandalism, types of vandalism and stylistic feature. By doing this, school vandalism is categorized and described clearly.

Language Choice

The language used for expressing oneself in vandalism is diverse. Inasmuch as the authorship of vandalism is anonymous, the choice for language is freer. In this study, five languages have been dominant. The most dominant choice was the Filipino language with 43 or 53.75% followed by English with 16 or 20%. The choice for Filipino may be attributed to the fact that most students were using Filipino as a medium of communication in school. As the vandals were also coming from different ethnic groups in Cagayan, some vandals were also expressive of their own ethnic language. For example, 10 or 12.50% of the vandalism was written in Itawes, 8 or 10% were in Ilocano and 3 or 3.75% were written in Ibanag.

Language	Frequency	Percentage
English	16	20%
Filipino	43	53.75%
Ibanag	3	3.75%
Itawes	10	12.50%
Ilocano	8	10%
Total	90	100.00%

The language choice in the vandalism conveys nasty terms either in English, Filipino, Ibanag and Ilokano. These nasty words are reflective of the language of the youth which is part of youth culture. Majority of these words are 'fuck you', *tang-ina*, *puta*, *attug*, *uki*, *magnanakaw*, *suput*, bitch, and *akiayuk*. All of these are nasty or obscene words in colloquial terms and they refer to human organ and the like.

On the other hand, there is also the use of *jejemon* language. Examples of *jejemon* language "mahal kaseh (kasi) kita", (Because I love you); jejejejeje!" and sorrie (sorry). Another example of Filipino statement is "3ow ph0w, mUsZtAhnA?" translated into Filipino as "Hello po, kamustana?, translated into English as "Hello, how are you?".

According to the Urban Dictionary, a *Jejemon* is a person "who has managed to subvert the English language to the point of incomprehensibility." The Philippine Daily Inquirer (2005) describes *Jejemons* as a "new breed of hipster who have developed not only their own language and written text but also their own sub-culture and fashion." It can be originated from SMS-writing. SMS language (also used as txt, texting language, texts or txt talk) is the term for the abbreviations and slang used in text messages. It is also widespread in e-mails and instant messaging as well as chat messaging. The style of messaging used in cellphones is also visible in the writing of vandalism. Examples are as follows :

- *'Landiin mo na ang lahat wag lang ang taong mahal qoh! Mahal kase kita. Sorie.* (You can seduce everyone except the one I love. Because I love you. Sorry)
- *I luv u* (I love you)
- Huhuhu
- *Talaga aman* (naman)
- *Di lang mahiya yak (yack) iw* (Shame on you, yack)

- *You know guys, kachipan yang ginagawanyo!* (You know guys, you're so cheap)
- *Cnu* (sino) (Who)

According to Plesch (2002), who conducted a study on Cybercultural Communication Texting, the objective of SMS language is to use the least number of characters needed to convey a comprehensible message. He also asserted many telecommunication companies have an SMS character limit and the benefit of SMS language is to reduce the character count of a message. Hence, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization are largely ignored. It is similar to the old telegraph systems: people want to save money by using less characters (although nowadays you have to pay for 160 characters, anyway).

Interestingly, the use of a pseudonym was very common in the vandalism collected in the different schools. This is practiced to show anonymity of the writer. Vividly, these pseudonyms were also written after the statements they have written on walls. Examples of the pseudonyms that were used by the respondents in this study are Tindalo, 3 girls, and bad girl. These pseudonyms were used to show anonymity of the respondents because of fear of being identified as writers of these vandals. In the interview conducted with the student respondents during the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), conveying the message to the right person is more important than identifying the writer of the vandalism. This corroborates the finding of the study that indeed one of the reasons why they indulge into vandalism is that it is the respondents' way of communicating and expressing themselves.

To show the language choice used in vandalizing among the respondents, the following pictures are presented.
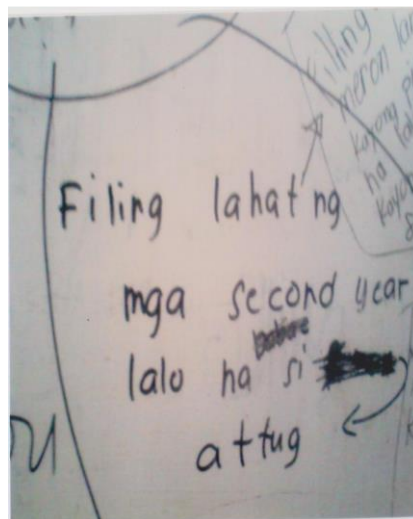
Filipino
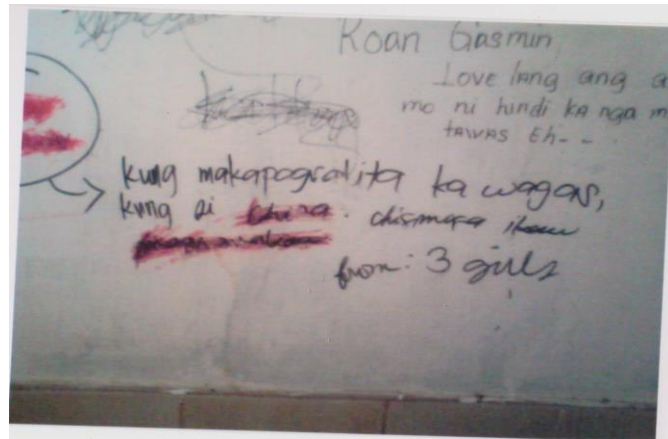
English
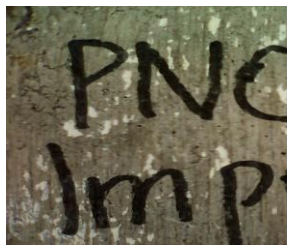
Itawes

Ibanag

Stylistic Features of Vandalism

Vandalism has many stylistic features. By definition, stylistic vandalism refers to the use of repetition, short word forms, numbers, humor, symbolism and taboo language. A perusal of the different vandalism collected revealed that most of them fall under taboo language with 29 or 36.25%; 28 or 35% are classified as numbers; 24 or 30% labeled as symbolism and repetition 9 or 11.25%.

The scribbling of repetitive letters or words which have meaning is very vivid in the collected vandalism writings in the study. Examples are SS, SS13, SS James and SS. When asked about what these terms mean, the respondents revealed that it denotes *salsal (*masturbation*)*. Significantly, the boys have written this repetitive letters. As individuals in the puberty stage, masturbation is an experience that they explore in their life. Sexual curiosity, arousal, and behavior are spontaneously expressed during puberty and early adolescence stage. According to Kan (2006). in her article Child and Adolescent Sexuality Survey. As the hormones come into play, there are rapid growth spurts and increasingly intense physical sensations. Sexual behaviors respond to a stronger biological mandate and the genital focus intensifies. Sexual experience may be the paramount goal during puberty stage. Masturbation increases in frequency, and may be experienced alone or in groups. Boys often acquire pornographic materials. Some early adolescents fall in love and openly express their affectionate feelings. In a way, all of these sexual experiences and behavioral manifestation can be expressed in vandalism.

It has been discovered that there are vandalism writings that are very similar to the writing of short and repetitive words that are sexual in nature. These writings have been labeled as taboo language. Swearing, cursing, and obscenity are only a few of the taboos that have been broken in the act of vandalism. Taboo terms denote forbiddenness, a societal force that regulates what an individual is allowed to do and what is considered proper behavior. Teenagers use harsh or vulgar language, which is derogatory to the rest of society. According to the findings of this study, such taboos are represented by the expressions pesti (fuck), bitch ka (you're a bitch), matay ka na (you're a dead man), fuck you, ayut (sex), baboy and ukkinnam (you're a pig, mother fucker), and suput (uncircumcised). They are conveyed in dialects as well as the Filipino language, which are the primary languages spoken by the people who responded to this survey in the area. Perhaps writing these terms is an expression of rage and a response to the earlier vandalism directed towards him/her/them, as well as a kind of revenge. The presence of taboo language, it appears, is indicative of a youth culture that has a proclivity to engage in forbidden language behavior.

According to Dombrowski (201 I), children learn sexual vocabulary at a young age through their interactions with their peers. The usage of sexual references is discouraged and punished by parents, which teaches youngsters that sexual phrases are extremely powerful. Sex discussion becomes more dependent on who is listening rather than the fear of parental negation and omission that is associated with sex talk as

teenagers mature in both linguistic and sexual development, as shown in the chart below. Sexual conversation among young people is an important issue since it is one that has personal significance while yet maintaining a socially unacceptable stigma in formal settings.

The existence of symbols in the vandal writings, it is interesting to note, may perhaps have some significance to the vandal authors. Heart shapes, gang emblems, fuck you signs, and human organs are among the symbols found in a collection of these symbols. All of these symbols represent the way adolescents express themselves, as well as their preoccupations with various aspects of life. Understanding that a symbol is an object that symbolizes, stands for, or implies an idea, visual picture (belief), action (or material entity), or any combination of these things is essential. It might take the shape of words, sounds, gestures, or visual pictures, and it is used to communicate thoughts and beliefs to other people. An organ representing love and

compassion, for example, may be represented by the heart, whereas a sex organ may indicate sexual fantasy, need, or preoccupation.

Symbolic vandalism, on the other hand, was quite prevalent in many of the respondents' acts of vandalism. Symbols are a significant component of gang culture, and it should be noted that they are used extensively. They are used to distinguish one gang from another, to frighten other gangs, and to show disdain for rival gangs. They appear in a variety of shapes and forms throughout the study, including a drawing of the phrase "F*ck you," a heart shape, a men's organ, and gang emblems. The prominence of phrases such as fuck you and sex-related symbols either indicates anger or sexual preoccupation on the part of the youth, but the heart shape represents their feelings of love and affection. All of these are symptomatic of the type of emotional state and general mentality that the young people are experiencing.

Furthermore, the responses to vandalism were represented in the vandalism that has been written on the walls. In the presence of these comments, we can conclude that it is, in fact, a form of communication in which there is a sender and receiver, in addition to a feed-

forward mechanism. To a large extent, comments reflect the reaction of readers to the vandal writer's writing. Moreover, it signifies that the writer was successful in getting responses from the audience. The most common reactions to this type of vandalism were anger

and dismay. For example: You know guys, kachipan yang ginagawa nyo (the writer is assuming); Feeling ang nagsulat (the writer is assuming); (You know guys, you are demeaning yourself with what you are doing). Do not be arrogant because you have nothing to brag about, especially if you are Eliza Cruz. (Do not be arrogant because you have nothing to brag about, especially if you are Eliza Cruz.)

Table 6. Stylistic Features

Stylistic Features	Frequency	Percentage
Symbols	24	30%
Repetition	9	11.25%
Taboo language	29	36.25%
Numbers	28	35%
Total	90	100.00%

The use of numerals in vandalism was also quite obvious in the photographs used for the study, which is a final point to mention. Having numbers in their presence may indicate their identity, and only people who are familiar with these numbers will comprehend what it implies. As an example, the numbers 05 Vince; I love you 14, Mayash # 11, 07 ko; 39; and YBOR 11 are used. In accordance with this, the graffiti writings contained numbers, which indicate that the respondents attempted to conceal their identities. It must be understood that numerals are symbols for numbers in the same way that personal names are symbols for the individuals they represent. As a result, the respondents' employment of symbols lends credence to the notion that numbers are, in fact, kinds of language in and of themselves. For each number, there is a specific meaning associated with it, and it has value to the humans who have written it. For vandal writers, this is especially true because they connect themselves with numbers, and in this situation, the numbers speak for themselves or their identity as an individual.

Conclusions and Recommendations

However, despite the fact that they are aware that vandalism is an inappropriate form of conduct, the students continue to engage in it since they are in the company of their friends who allow them to do anything and who encourage them to engage in this type of activity. As a result of their high regard for expressivity while with friends, these individuals become the key drivers of this behavior. In this regard, the culture of silence (i.e., students' apathy toward reporting vandals) among students, which allows vandalism to thrive in schools, is a crucial facilitating factor for its development.

As a final point, the prevalence of vandalism culture and its underlying causes revealed that it is the youth's preferred mode of communication because there are few less restrictive avenues for them to express themselves, to be recognized, and to convey messages about real-world issues and concerns that affect them.

Thus, providing our young people with positive options to use their free time constructively such as engaging them in sports, artworks, exercise class, or other extracurricular activities where their attention and actions will be driven into socially acceptable and beneficial things. Support system from significant people such as family, school and peers may as well be provided so that these student respondents feel that they are recognized, appreciated, cared for, and loved by people around them thus, there is no room for them to engage in activities that are futile and are not socially favorable. It is highly desirable therefore to create opportunities for the development of self-expression culture as well as a social environment.

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