

Reinterpreting School Vandalism: A Textual Analysis

Alma B. Manera, Cagayan State University, Philippines

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Abstract

This study unraveled the meaning conveyed from vandalism through textual analysis. Specifically, it determined the profile of the respondents, the reasons for performing vandalism, characteristics of the school vandalism in terms of language choice, placement, types and stylistic features. Moreover, it also determined the denotative and connotative meaning of the vandalism, its social messages, and the vandal's personal, academic and social lived experiences. The result of the study was the basis for developing a proposed anti-vandalism program for the different secondary schools in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, Philippines.

The study being qualitative in nature has three assumptions. First, vandalism used specific and stylistic features of language. Second, vandalism is used to communicate messages personal and social issues. Third, vandalism is an alternative medium of communication to convey messages on real life issues affecting students.

Three public schools and three private high schools were used in the study. The three public schools were Cagayan National High School, Linao National High School, and Cataggamman National High School. On the other hand, the private schools were University of Saint Louis, University of Cagayan Valley and John Wesley College. A total of 125 respondents were used in the study obtained through purposive sampling and snow ball sampling. A total of 263 pictures of vandalism were collected in the study and they were analysed through thematic and textual analysis.

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After subjecting the collected vandalism to textual and thematic analysis, the following are the findings of the study:

The profile of the respondents reveals that most of the respondents are males (47 or 60.26%); they are 15 years old (50 or 40%); third year level (50 or 40%); belonging to lower section (92 or 73.60%); middle born (78 or 30.76%) and have parents who are high school graduate (30 or 38.46%) .

The three (3) most dominant reasons for performing of vandalism are *to express one's emotion or self-expression* (34 or 27.2%); *to communicate a message* (29 or 23.4%); and *to get revenge or to rebel* (20 or 16%).

The language choice used in vandalism reveals that the most dominant choice is the Filipino language (63 or 46.32%) followed by English with 43 or 31.61. As for the placement of vandalism, majority (56 or 40.57) are found on the walls and the most common type of vandalism are individualized/popular (53 or 41.73%) and tags (45 or 35.43%). Moreover, the visible stylistic features of the vandalism fall under taboo language (27 or 34.09%), numbers (26 or 30.22%) and symbolism (25 or 29.07%).

A textual analysis of the denotative and connotative meaning of gang vandalism reveals that they are produced solely as a means of gang communication and partly as a claim of territoriality. Political vandalism is used to discredit the New People's Army and to Impeach the President. These are political cry to register political dissidence and express social alienation from them. Finally, the vindictive vandalism reveals vulgar and obscene words illustrating the personal insult and rage of the vandals.

The recurrent themes expressed in the collected vandalism are centered on love (42 or 39.25%) and sex (26 or 24.29%) which are expressive of the concerns of the adolescents.

The personal lived experience of the respondents regarding the phenomenon of vandalism reveals that vandalism is an avenue of expression and of claiming their identity and territoriality. On the other hand, the academic lived experience shows that vandalism did not help them in their schooling or improve their academic performance rather the bad label or image of a vandal remained in the collective memory of school administrators and teachers causing them to be suspicious and distrustful in all things they do.

Finally, vandalism is perceived as a way of connection or establishing a sense of belongingness and group identity.

The heart of the proposed Anti-Vandalism Program for Secondary Schools in Tuguegarao City addresses the issues and concerns regarding schools' physical environment; changing the vandal writer; organizing student, faculty, support staff and parents task force; troubleshooting the vandalism; and improving schools' climate.

Conclusions

Based on the foregoing findings, it can be concluded that indeed vandalism is pervasive in the different secondary schools in Tuguegarao City and the students are into this kind of act because of the need for self-expression. Writing on the wall is a way of saying that they are ‘being there’ even if they are not physically there. Their vandal writings are manifestations of their aggressive assertion that they are persons who speak, fight, love and long to be recognized. It is through vandalism that they are able to release their state of mind: their madness, sexuality, happiness, anger, rebellion or affection. As a form of connection, vandalism also provides them a link with their friends, classmates, schoolmates and gangsters who are the target readers or audience of their craft. In a sense, their vandalism writing is their way of claiming their identity and belongingness. This reality is a vivid manifestation of the desire of the youth to put ‘personal stamp’ of their school which is part of the youth culture wherein there is desire for recognition, search for identity and autonomy.

Interestingly, the study concludes that vandalism is a show of declaring the students’ concept of territoriality or a claim of ownership of a public place. They see the school as a public place and their mind set is that they also own the place. Writing something on the wall, bench, fence and the like makes them proclaim their ownership of the place as there are many others who claim ownership of the same. Thus, vandalism is conceived as a youthful high spirit or as an unconscious attempt on the part of the teenagers to exercise control over their environment by leaving some sign of their presence.

Although the students know that vandalism is an unacceptable behaviour, they persist to do this because they are in the company of their friends who allow them to do anything and who support them in such kind of endeavour. This happens because they value expressivity much when they are with friends who become primary drivers in this act. A significant facilitating factor for nurturing vandalism in this regard is the culture of silence (apathy of students not to report vandals) among students which allow vandalism to reside in schools.

Finally, the pervasiveness of vandalism culture and its underlying reasons reveals that it the youth’s coping strategy to communicate because of the lack of less restrictive avenues for them to express themselves, to be recognized and to convey the messages on real life issues and concerns affecting them. Thus, the need to provide avenues to develop culture of self-expression and social environment is much desired.

Recommendations

On the basis of the foregoing findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are presented:

Vandalism issue must be given preferential and immediate concern by school administrators and teachers. It must be an issue to be discussed on the table with students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders as this is a symptom of the issues, problems and concerns of the youth;

School administrators must improve culture of self-expression and social environment of their schools. They must direct adolescents to more reasonable avenues of expression and also improve their creativities through less restrictive, controlled and artificial means;

The Proposed Anti-Vandalism Program must be implemented in the different secondary schools in Tuguegarao City;

A similar study must be conducted focusing on the jejemon language used in vandalism as well as the homosexual themes reflected in the vandalism.