

ECCE 2018
VII International Conference Early Childhood Care and Education

TEENAGERS' VANDAL ACTIVITY IN THE INTERNET ENVIRONMENT: FREQUENCY, TYPES, RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

The article describes modern types and risks of cyber vandalism in teenagers' environment. Vandal activity in social networks is steadily increasing (Mursalieva, 2017). New types of cyber vandalism appear in teenager's environment of megalopolises, where involvement in social networks tends to 100%. Teenagers don't see anything reprehensible committing vandalism in the network. Hacking other's pages, Internet trolling and cyber bullying do not seem to be the big evil and become ordinary. However, the alternative consequences for the victims and the actors themselves present serious risks for the socialization and mental and physical health of the underage. Teenagers' vandalism is also active in the virtual space; city-dwellers spit out dissatisfaction and search for profits in networks, hacking someone else's accounts and creating fake ones.

Urban environment requires city-dwellers to increase the pace of social transactions, and teenagers' psyche doesn't stand up, so teenagers are increasingly trying to find a way out of accumulated aggression in social networks. Starting trolling classmates or in search of shelter from the daily urban race, teenagers become victims of cyber bullying spending time in the networks. Unsafe behaviour in the networks leads to loss of confidentiality, because interviewed respondents do not consider hacking someone else's data as something reprehensible. Empirical data is gathered in Ekaterinburg in teens' chats, opened and closed on-line groups of VK.com, as well as through questioning, processed by statistical packages and analyzed in a cross-disciplinary manner within psychology, sociology, philosophy, economic and social development of the territory.

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Keywords: Teenagers, Internet, vandalism, the territory of a megalopolis, cyber vandalism.



1. Introduction

1.1. Urban cyber environment as a stress factor

Vandalism is a destructive activity of a person, determined by internal and external conditions, expressing a protest against existing social norms. A group of researchers of vandalism and destructive behaviour in childhood and teens (Gurova et al, 2017), etc.), distinguish such types of vandalism as aesthetic, mercenary, existential, etc., including those noted in the urban environment. Megalopolis environment provokes city residents to seek the possibility of changing it in the simplest way, preferably with a change in emotional state (Kruzhkova et al, 2017). So, vandalism can be considered a bifurcation point, and a change in the environment will depend on the reaction of society to vandalism.

1.2. Social networks for a vandal as getting prize

Because of the absence of a suitable rehabilitation infrastructure, young people increasingly relax in networks, including through vandalism, trolling, hacking of foreign pages, creating pages under a false name for opportunistic behaviour.

In open teenage chat rooms, we have investigated examples of cyber vandalism that could be grouped into several types:

- Internet trolling
- cyber bullying
- flaming
- ostracism
- happy Slapping

The most dangerous is Internet trolling, that has the main task of emotional and intellectual pick-up, can be used for demoralizing the victim and unbalancing for easier involvement in other groups or expulsion from this group. Internet trolling reduces victim's self-assessment, and immediately helps appear who sell to the victim a service or product or engage in their own circles and take advantage of them.

The second of the most dangerous forms of on-line communication is cyber bullying, used for emotional abuse of a victim, with the aim of implementing destructive behavioural motives and increasing the initiator's self-assessment.

Both types can grow into consumer, content and cyber-risks (Bobkova, 2012; Parinov et al, 2017). Abuse of consumer rights, including distribution of poor-quality or counterfeit information, including materials not suitable for children's perception, pornography, propaganda of extremism, drugs, gambling, religious sects, suicide, obscene language, having psychological influence and impact through friendly contacts, etc.

2. Problem Statement

In the urban environment, off-line residents often have to meet the results of vandalism. Vandals like to leave a trail or provoke others, or to inform the world about something, including for profit (Kaspersky Lab., 2017).

The problem of cyber vandalism is periodically posed by researchers (Bobkova, 2012; Danilov et al, 2013; etc.) However, a cross-disciplinary, systematic study of the problem is necessary. Today, the same vandals are increasingly "working" in social networks. This is a fairly common kind of vandalism, which includes teaching without the consent of the owner of personal information, creating fake resources (accounts, pages and profiles), backdoors, virus attacks, online fraud, spam (infosecurity.ru, Pamoukaghlian, 2016 ; Danilov et al, 2013, etc.).

Scientific schools of psychologists give advice for parents (Mursalieva, 2017), monitor children's behaviour in the networks and show safe ways. However, how many parents regularly do this, how many of them are psychologists, educators or IT specialists, in order to competently, accurately and effectively help children, which will be of long-term effect.

In fact, one can say that potentially the space of social networks is a fertile ground for manifestation of virtualized vandalism against the pages of other users, and the forms of such vandalism can be very diverse. Following the fashion and pressure of mass culture, children and teenagers actively seek to enter the Internet and social networks, but because of their small social experience, they are easily exposed to high risks of collision with such acts of vandalism. Assessment of the probability of these risks and algorithms of their minimization requires a full-fledged empirical analysis of the very causes of their occurrence.

3. Research Questions

Apparently, the key reason for such risks of vandalism in social networks is the expressed social acceptability of those practices that are logically related to this phenomenon. Obviously, their very existence is possible because a part of society (perhaps even relatively large) doesn't see anything reprehensible in them. Therefore, the empirical analysis of the problem should be related to the study of the patterns that influence on the degree of such acceptability. And in this case, it makes sense to address the study of sentiment not for the entire Internet audience (which would be extremely difficult because of the high dynamics of its development), but only its active representatives – teenagers. About the extremely high activity of using the Internet by representatives of this age group is shown both by the internal analyst of Russian social networks and by independent sociological studies. The analysis of those views and opinions that are common among representatives of this age group, largely contributes to understanding the attitudes of Internet users and social networks in general.

The problem outlined in the present paper is called for addressing two interrelated issues regarding the attitudes of teens representatives:

- First, how is vandalism understood by the representatives of this group?
- Secondly, do they perceive harm to other people's pages in social networks as vandalism?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was the initial assessment of the degree of social acceptability of vandalism and its potential manifestations in the space of social networks for representatives of Russian urban teenagers. .

5. Research Methods

The specifics of the goal set the need to address the sociological instruments and study the attitudes of teenagers.

5.1. Research technics

Empirical basis for the work was a questionnaire survey, implemented among teenagers of Ekaterinburg. The subject of the questionnaire was the views about the nature of vandalism and vandal acts. Data was collected using the Google-docs service and processed using a Vortex statistical application.

5.2. Sampling

In total, 304 teenagers of Ekaterinburg were interviewed during the survey. For the selection of respondents, a quota sample was used by assessment of sex, age, and material status.

6. Findings

The analysis, carried out during the processing of received answers, enables us to speak about several trends.

6.1. Vandalism for the respondents is a condemned, but generally acceptable phenomenon

On the one hand, at first sight the distribution of the answers does not give the grounds for such conclusions. At the basic associative level of interpretation of vandalism, most of the respondents are clearly prone to negativism (Figure 01, Figure 02).

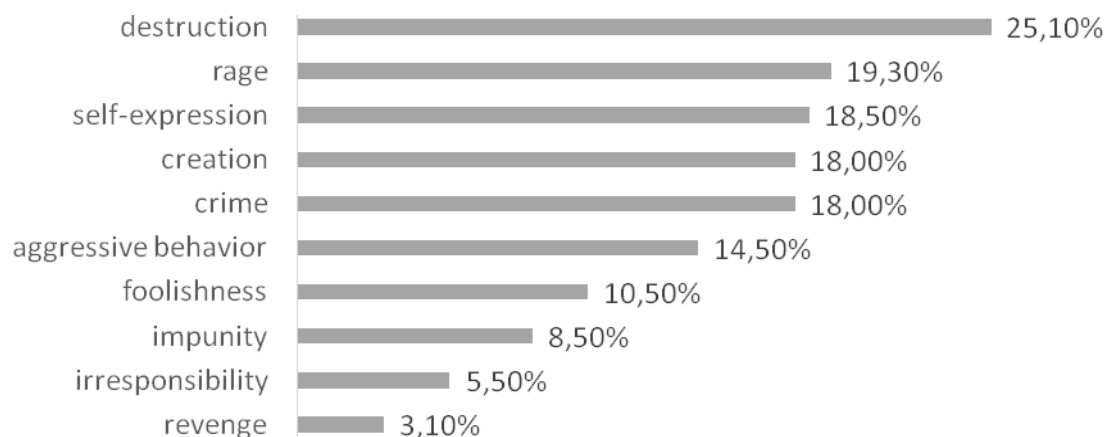


Figure 01. Spontaneous associations of the respondents with the word "vandalism" (open-ended question, TOP-10 answers, % of the number of respondents)

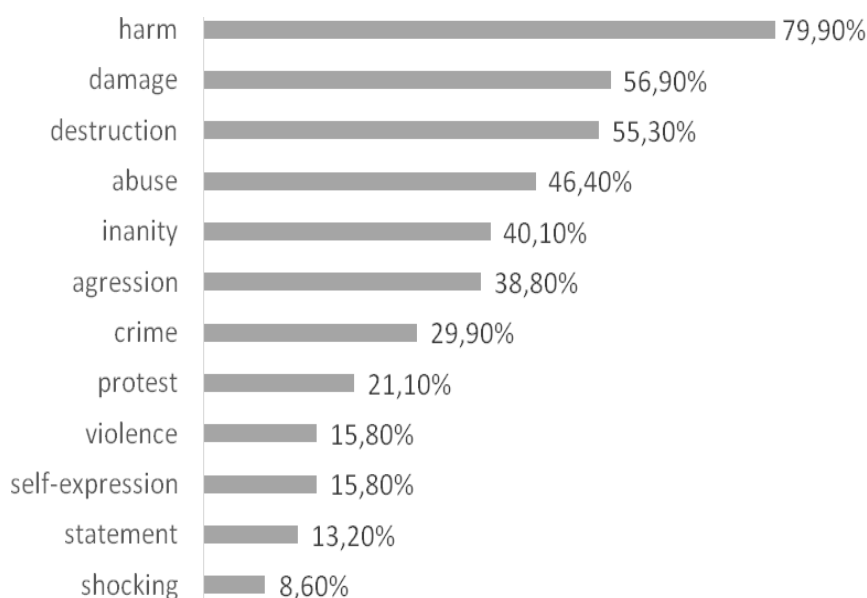


Figure 02. Words, that, according to respondents, describe the essence of vandalism (closed question, % of the number of respondents)

Unprovoked associations with the word "vandalism", obtained through answers to an open question, are mostly negative: destruction (25.1%), anger / rage (19.3%), crime (18.0%). Similar results are obtained from the analysis of provoked associations, which were obtained on the basis of the question with the answer options: the leaders in popularity here were harm (79.9%), damage (56.9%), destruction (55.3%), abuse (46, 4%). In other words, at the stereotyped level, the majority of the respondents have a clear association of vandalism with something condemned, negative. On the other hand, more detailed analysis suggests some flexibility in their assessments. First, the contrast between provoked and unprovoked associations leads to this conclusion: without seeing a clear list of options for the answer, the interviewees less often call negative associations with vandalism and more often mention assessed neutral positions (such as self-expression, creativity). Secondly, this is indicated by the distribution of answers to the question of whether vandalism can be regarded as acceptable behaviour: 60.5% of the respondents admit such an excuse. Thus, although the interviewed young people cannot be called deliberately predisposed to vandalism, the taboo nature of such practices is not obvious to them at all.

6.2. The meaningful understanding of vandalism among the respondents is narrowed and reduces it only to committing frankly destructive, wrecking actions.

The analysis shows that types of actions perceived by the respondents as manifestations of vandalism can be divided into three groups. First, these are the actions clearly associated with the manifestations of vandalism (they are called as a form of vandalism by at least 40% of the respondents): to post on the wall (55.9%), make a pass in the fence (44.4%), make graffiti (40.5%). Secondly, these are actions that are attributed to vandalism from case to case (more than 15% of respondents named them, but less than 40%): to make inscribe on the desk (34.2%), hack someone's page in social network (23.7%),

walk the dog in an unsuitable place (22.4%). Thirdly, these are actions that are almost totally unrelated to manifestations of vandalism (15% of respondents and less): to make a path on the lawn (14.1%), post ads on poles (11.8%), spread lies about another person (5.9%), throw coins into ponds (4.6%).

6.3. The Internet and social networks are not perceived as a space for committing vandalism.

The answers of the respondents show that violation of the inviolability of other people's pages in the social network is a very rare phenomenon (Figure 03).

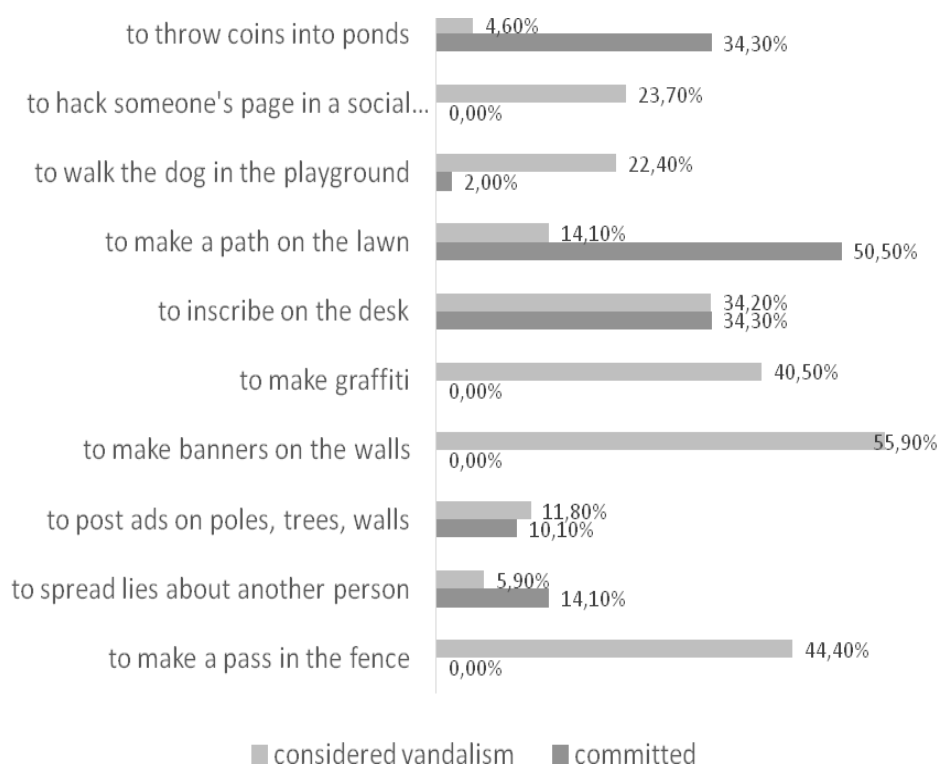


Figure 03. Comparison of the actions performed by the respondents and the actions they associate with vandalism (closed question, % of the number of respondents)

None of the respondents have had experience of such actions. At the same time, such activity is not perceived as something deliberately negative and is not seen by most as a manifestation of vandalism. In fact, one may note that, despite the lack of experience of such actions, the majority of the respondents do not correlate them with vandalism and are not ready to consider it in this field. It is noteworthy that such sentiments are universal: they are practically equally traceable both among boys and girls and, in fact, do not depend on assessing their financial situation, the frequency of Internet use, or the level of civic engagement. In other words, at the associative level, hacking of pages in social networks and vandalism for most of the respondents are simply not connected.

7. Conclusion

In public systems, a state will become stable, that is chosen not by chance, as in natural-science environments (physical and biological), but determined by a strong-willed solution. After making this decision, the public mechanisms of the "invisible hand" will be able to maintain the state of urban environment of megalopolis on the same trajectory, the change in state becomes difficult. Based on the obtained data, it is clear that it's important not to miss the moment of the point of bifurcation. The moment of renewal of social norms, norms of behaviour in the network, ways of responding to violation of prescribed norms, and even more importantly, to prevent vandal and aggressive behaviour through its replacement by socially-positive opportunities for transforming the environment and learning to confront cyber vandalism.

Since, the teenagers' environment is characterized by a desire to resist existing norms and rules, the desire to realize personal freedom and the manifestation of personal unique qualities, cyber vandalism is becoming increasingly popular in the form of emotional and intellectual hounding. However, teenagers are not able to withstand vandalism in their address, which leads to the emergence and development of teenagers' auto-destructions and cyber addictions as well as high risks of vulnerability for scammers, cyber terrorists and other illegal or antisocial communities.

Acknowledgments

This study was prepared on the basis of support of Russian Science Foundation (RSF) grant 17-18-01278.

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