

Scientific Content Analysis of Anonymous Letters received by Mumbai Police: A Research Study

Meenal Makhija, S. S. Nathawat and S.L. Vaya

Amity Institute Of Behavior And Allied Sciences, Amity University, Jaipur Rajasthan, Head Amity Centre For Positivity, Amity University, Jaipur Rajasthan, And Institute Of Research And Development, Raksha Shakti University, Ahmedabad, India

Corresponding Author: Meenal Makhija,

Amity Institute of Behavior and Allied Sciences, Amity University, Amity Education

Valley, Kant Kalwar, NH-11C, Jaipur Delhi Highway, Jaipur, Rajasthan 303007, India

Abstract

Anonymous Letters received by the Mumbai Police has been a major area of concern over the years. The dilemma still stands whether to pay heed to them or to just disregard them; taking into consideration that some of them could be deceitful in nature while the others raising genuine concerns. An effort is made in finding a solution to this dilemma with the help of a technique known as content analysis or discourse analysis or statement analysis; the technique can act as an aid in decoding these letters to its core components. This could help in gaining an insight into the crimes reported most frequently through such letter. How much of the information provided is genuine, if there is any modus operandi in place while receiving such letters or from the side of the writer in terms of writing such anonymous letters to police which are aimed at legal action. With the help of this technique, it is possible for the professional psychologists to create psychological profiles of writers of such anonymous letters.

KEYWORDS: Anonymous Letters, Mumbai Police, content analysis, discourse analysis, statement analysis, modus of operandi, legal action, professional psychologists, psychological profiles

Anonymous Complaints is a mode identified as being able to raise a concern to authorities without giving them the knowledge about who is providing this information. The reasons for doing so can be infinite such as threat to self or others, lack of confidence, possible conspiracy, and so on. There also lies a huge possibility or rather a fact that some people take the privilege in being anonymous also to harm the reputation and esteem of others for their own personal or professional benefit. This is a common problem faced by authorities receiving such complaints leading to honest people being demoralized and their reputation being tarnished.

Taking into account the situation in Mumbai, India; a lot of such anonymous complaints are received by the Mumbai Police in the form of letters but these letters are not taken into consideration unless the content of the letter or the crime stated through the

letter is very serious and needs attention. This is based purely on the understanding of the officer to whom the letter has been addressed. No scientific study has been carried forward in India in the past which could help understand and investigate on the deeper meaning and analyze these anonymous letters for what they have in store to tell everyone. This could help improvise the process that is being followed to address such anonymous letters.

The question is how can this be done? A professional forensic psychologist will be able to help by scientifically examining these letters by implementing the technique of content analysis, also known as statement analysis or discourse analysis. It is a technique new to India and even though a small portion of the expert population in the field are using in Forensic Laboratories and courts have appreciated their result. Its regular implementation in our judicial system is still farfetched and has tremendous scope of growth. The technique of content analysis helps dissect a statement for its structure, content and meaning; this technique when incorporated with the knowledge endowed by forensic psychologist over the years can give prodigious results.

The rules and regulations about what should be done with such anonymous letters have been put in place by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC). The CVC brought out its first rule about such complaints in 1999 and there have made modifications in the same ever since. The reason why rules were put in place was to increase accountability of accusations being made especially against honest officers moreover during the time of their promotions which was a trend noticed over a period of time. Therefore, the rule put in place was to not take any of anonymous or pseudonymous complaints into account unless deemed important as exception; however, the same was improvised upon over the years wherein they had started taking such complaints into account but their last circular in 2016 modified the rule back to no enquiry and direct filing of the same.

In the same way many other countries have also modified rules with regards to the same for example Israel used to take into consideration such letters till 2016 but stopped ever since they realized that their honest officers were being targeted by means of such letters by people who were found breaking the law; whereas, United States accepts anonymous complaints through various modes and has been outsourced to a private agency to manage. Every country either accepting or not accepting such anonymous complaints have their own practical experiences behind the same but this does not mean that there is no scope of improvisation. Rules are always put in place with regards to people being punished if found providing deceitful information.

Anonymous letters have a lot of offer in terms of various aspects that can be explored; such as both the content, the writer, the accused and so on. Through this research proposal, a lot of aspects about these anonymous letters can be revealed and a clear dimension can be achieved. It is obvious that each one of the anonymous letters is pertaining to bringing up one complaint in another words crime, because they are specifically addressed to the police; if one was able to identify what crimes are most often reported through the means of such letter; that is, are they civil or criminal in nature. As per the CVC the crimes most reported through such letters have been towards accusing honest officers but if one could prove the same scientifically by carrying forward an elaborate research, specific actions could be planned and taken with regards to the same. This in turn will lead to a deeper understanding of why the means of anonymous letters is used over making known complaints which could help the police

officials get all the information they need to investigate and eradicate the problem. This research study will help understand if the writers of such letters display any particular pattern that they follow pertaining to the action of writing and sending an anonymous letters. If, this is the first letter or third and why, was any attempt made to be known for the complaint being made. The writing of such letters to the police officials indicate that writers trust police officers to do something about their complaint, but if that is the case, then why the need to be anonymous. The potential reasons could be unlimited but any common practices could well be noted and taken into consideration.

Also, let's take in to consideration being able to draw out demographic details of the writers who write such letters which gets us closer to shortlisting the possible people who could have written the letter and consider an added advantage of being able to create a psychological profile of such writers. The demographic details along with the psychological profile of the writer could get officials close to the actual person who could have written the letter and also, the investigation could be continued to punish this person if the information provided by the means of such letters are deceitful in nature. The fact that psycholinguistics aids in identifying writers of anonymous letters could possibly not be taken into consideration with a surety right now as a major obstruction to do the same could be listed down to the fact that all population may still not be accounted for. But, this is just one limitation; however, it does not eliminate the idea of creating psychological profile of writers and finding commonalities between them. Apart from this, one major criteria for evaluating or analyzing anonymous letters could be nailed down to the fact that it is very important to identify if the information provided by means of such letters is genuine or deceitful. In the current functioning, no letters is taken into consideration unless highly threatening in nature or if the officials think an enquiry should be carried forward with regards to the same; in this process a lot of genuine information could be lost that is provided by such letters. This study could help in scientifically eliminating the deceitful information from that of the genuine information.

It is taken for granted that each one of the writers of such anonymous letters have a goal that they could like to achieve which could either be to teach the accused a lesson if the information provided is genuine or to get the accused in trouble for no mistakes of theirs, that is if the information provided is deceitful in nature. This information could be verified by the police officers themselves based on the enquiry carried forward by them.

This scientific study can help explore what hidden message these anonymous letters have in store for the Mumbai Police, and how the technique used here could help the Police force in different aspects of their job.

Literature of Review

Addressing multiple concepts within the study we can note that each one carrying a distinguished background individually but cumulatively there has been barely a few researches on the same. One distinguished article very close to our area of study highlights on how psychologist and psychiatrist were able to create a psychological profile of anonymous writers just by the content of the letter (Casey-Owens, M. 1984, July). This technique of psycholinguistics or statement analysis or content analysis or discourse analysis has been adopted by professionals in the fields for various reasons being clinical practice to assess high risk offenders. The origin of the psychology behind language has been dated back till the 1770 but prospects of study to be carried out in the field have only grown ever since.

The use of psycholinguistics has only increased over the years and in the recent past has been used increasingly by psychologists to assess individuals in various forms of their practice. Before psycholinguistics came to known as a technique in formal and informal analysis; it started off more over as a research tool and over the years of study it came into practice as a proven technique. Back in 1979, Prof. Murray Miron was creating a threat dictionary which would aid in implementation of psycholinguistic analysis and his progress on dictionary had reached a summary of 15 million words. Avinoam Sapir (1987) a previous polygraph examiner introduced the technique of Scientific Content Analysis (SCAN) which analysis statements based on their content, and structure; and is able to distinguish truth from deceitful information and if any information has been concealed by the writer. Following this, a study carried out in 1996, supported the previously found facts that fabricated statements differ in both content and quality.

Understanding the history of anonymous letters it is a widely known fact such means of communication has been highly misleading and many have been written with the same agenda. Various types of anonymous letters have been researched upon such as letters sent to the editors of media organizations, letters sent informing about white collar crimes, or letters that this study takes into consideration (the one's sent to the police stating crimes). This is a worldwide problem and each country has found their appropriate way to deal with the same based on past experience. Previous attempts have been made to psychologically profile writers of such letters but not on an extensive scale. There is no previous data of any such study done in India; while, the one done by Casey Owens (1984) was a similar attempt to throw light on how the technique used by psychologist and psychiatrist can be of great assistance. Another finding mentioned in her study stated that more educated individuals were writers of such anonymous letters in their stride of overestimating their area of expertise. This is a finding that we are about to explore in our findings of the study.

Methodology

A qualitative design involved collecting secondary data in the form of such anonymous letters received by the police stations in Mumbai from the year 2013 to 2015. The study involves analyzing these anonymous letters for the kind of crimes that have been addressed through the means of such letters, if any particular modus operandi was in play with regards to each letters and to create a psychological profile of the possible person that could have written the anonymous letter to the police. The anonymous letters provided for the study are highly confidential and are provided for the purpose of research only. Any publishing made with regards to the study shall first be condition to approval from higher authorities of the police and with their approval shall it be passed further. The study also attempts to take into account if any similar characteristics are found among writers of such anonymous letters. A technique known as the Scientific Content Analysis (SCAN) that will be used to execute the study along with the knowledge of forensic psychology to enhance the findings. An online distant learning of the SCAN Basic and Advanced Course was taken up by the researcher to carry forward the study in an ethical manner. Each of the anonymous letter was analyzed using the SCAN technique which emphasizes of analyzing the content, structure and meaning and identifying them as being deceitful or genuine in nature. Furthermore, using criteria's provided in the DSM V, the Personality Disorder Trait Domain and Facets are included as part of the analysis using knowledge base of Clinical and Forensic Psychology; which

helped in identifying personality traits of writers of anonymous letters and identify any commonality between them. Ideally this empirical model acts as an aid for experts in the field to create a tailor made psychological profile of an individual's personality disorder in ways of characterizing each individual traits. Therefore, here we can use the model in the study to identify similar personality facets found in small population of people who write anonymous letters.

A professional translator was hired for the task of translating the anonymous letters written in regional languages (Hindi and Marathi) to English. One blind spot of the study is firstly some anonymous letters of the year 2013 would have been destroyed before collection of the same as the police officials are obliged to store data only for 2 years and the collection took place between 2015 and 2016.

Conclusion

This study could lead us to remarkable results in terms of understanding the deeper meaning associated with such anonymous letters. It can be identified as to what crimes are most mentioned through means of such letters and if there is any reason in specific which could be identified for the specific crimes mentioned through means of such letters. This could also help gain insight into understanding; if the CVC's rules compliments the findings of the study or is there scope of improvisation for them. Also, if the technique used in the study can become a mandate for such letters to follow; because, the study also highlights how genuine information can be separated from deceitful information within one letter itself. This improvisation towards anonymous complaints could aim towards a decrease in the number of investigations that need to be followed to pertaining to the acquirement of such letters. The reason and understanding of why the choice to write an anonymous letter is of grave importance leaving aside the fact that a deceitful letter would indicate taking revenge against the accused specifically but when providing genuine information why choose anonymity if the trust has already been endowed on officers to whom the letter has been mentioned to. The scope of understanding if the writers of such anonymous letters took any prior attempt into consideration before resorting to the means of complaining and accusing someone by means of an anonymous letter and why specific officers were addressed through these letters to explore if there is any correlation with regards to authoritative officers that is officers at the upper designation receiving more letters as compared to those at lower designations. Also, exploring the possible personality traits found in common among writers of various letters and if any common trait can be specified to people who choose to right anonymous letters. There is one very obvious fact that everyone choosing to write anonymous letters have something to achieve by making this complaint against an accused which is either to take revenge for a personal grudge or to actually fight justice.

These are a lot of questions that can be answered by means of this research and have further scope for research following this study. Mainly, the added advantage of exploring a technique and the further use of the same in various way that would provide assistance to the judicial system.

Acknowledgements

¹I would like to take the opportunity to display my gratitude towards Mr. Rakesh Maria, former Commissioner of Police, Mumbai who gave me permission for me to go ahead and do this research and Mr. Dhananjay Kulkarni, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Crime Branch, Mumbai who thereafter was always available to assist and guide me through my study. I would also like to thank each and every one of the police officers in Mumbai who have helped me in some way directly or indirectly through my entire research. This study would have been incomplete without each one of them.

All the above mentioned people have been a very important part of my research but it is not necessary that they agree to all the above mentioned findings and conclusions of the research study. Everything mentioned in the study is unbiased and based purely on scientific findings.

References

Adams, S. H. (1996, October). Statement Analysis: What do suspects words really reveal? *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 12-20.

Advocate Khoj. (n.d.). Retrieved from [www.advocatekhoj.com: http://www.advocatekhoj.com/library/bareacts/indianpenalcode/index.php?Title=Indian%20Penal%20Code,%201860](http://www.advocatekhoj.com/library/bareacts/indianpenalcode/index.php?Title=Indian%20Penal%20Code,%201860)

Caesy-Owens, M. (1984, July). The Anonymous Letter Writer- A Psychological Profile? *Journal of Forensic Sciences, JFSCA*, 29(3), 816-819.

Coulthard, M. (1994). Powerful evidence for the defence: an exercise in forensic discourse analysis. *Language and the Law*, 414-427.

Cutler, A. (2005). *Twenty-First Century Psycholinguistics: Four Cornerstones*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Douglas, M. S. (1979). Threat Analysis: The Psycholinguistics Approach. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 5-9.

Ekman, P. (1985). *Telling Lies: Clues to Deceit in the Marketplace and Marriage*. London: W.W.Norton.

Last Name, F. M. (Year). Article Title. *Journal Title*, Pages From - To.

Last Name, F. M. (Year). *Book Title*. City Name: Publisher Name.

Lesce, T. (1990, August). SCAN: Deception Detection by Scientific Content Analysis. *Law and Order*, 38(8), 3-4.

Smith, N. (2001). *Reading between the Lines: An Evaluation of the Scientific Content Analysis technique (SCAN)*. Policing and Reducing Crime Unit Research. France: Crown.