

Curbing Deviant Behaviour among Library Users: The Control Perspective View

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Abstract

This study examines the extent to which control theory application in the library can help forestall deviant acts among library users. The approach taken was a librarian interview and observation of the library of the common deviant acts perpetuated by users, especially undergraduate students in some academic libraries in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that majority of the antisocial acts carried out by students were as a result of the weakness observed in the security and information resources protection activates in the library. Many said students engaged in the act because they want to prove the porosity of the security system of the library. This paper recommends that user education and socialization be made effective and content packed, modern theft detector devices be installed, regular stock taking be ensured and finally, the library should invest more in procurement of electronic resources which are less susceptible to abuse. The paper provides recommendations to libraries wishing to curb deviant acts of users and ensure prolong use of their library resources.

Introduction

Library can be said to be an organization where information is gathered, processed, stored and disseminated in both book and non-book form to users that needs the information by a qualified librarian. Users of the library vary depending on the type of library and they make use of the library and its resources for various reasons. Users exhibit some behaviours in the library, deviant behaviour is one of such behaviours. A deviant user is such who violates the rules and regulations of the library and thus, becomes a threat to the intellectual property through theft, mutilation and other forms of abuse. A way of controlling deviant behaviours among users is to put a proactive mechanism in place that will help curb deviant act even after educating the users because some will unavoidably deviate. Librarians charged with the keep of the library must be conscious of these deviant behaviours and must not be a partner in crime by their actions or inactions. Also, a working and effective mechanism should be put in place to check deviant acts of users ‘, because a porous security system will only leads to greater deviant rate among users.

Deviant behavior among library users

Every society, organization, group, etc. has its own set of norms and values which are held by all the members within the group, organization or community. Individuals, many a time through their actions and inactions, stray away, move away and deviate from the set standards, thus, we say such persons are deviants (Rock, 2000). Deviance as a concept does not have a

straight definition but has been defined variously by scholars and all definitions point at a particular issue which is, violating some set standards. Downess and Rock (2003) said deviance may be considered as banned or controlled behaviour, which is likely to attract punishment or disapproval.

In a library or an information centre the users are the last chain and the recipient of the information in the communication cycle. There are number of terms used as synonyms or near synonyms to users. They include patrons, clientele, members, customers etc. Of these, user is the preferred term. Information user can be categorized mainly into four groups, on the basis of their approach to information in a library; they are:

1. Potential user – One who needs information which can be provided by specific services.
 - i. The expected user – one who is known to have the intention of using certain information services.
 - ii. Actual user – one who has actually used an information service regardless of whether he derived advantage from it or not.
 - iii. The beneficiary user – One who derives measurable advantages from information services.
2. General readers – This type of user group are associated with public libraries, generally, they use light lending materials.
3. Subject readers – This type of user concentrate their use of library material on the subject field they are working or specialize.
4. Special readers – the users placed in this group are those with special needs, this is as a result of disabilities of one kind or another, physical or mental.
5. Non-reader users – These are made up of sub-groups who make use of library materials, but not reading materials. A user coming into the library just to borrow a video or audio-cassette is a good example of non-reading user (kumar & Phil, 2009).

Non-users

There are certain people who because of their style or other environmental problems could not become members of libraries in their vicinity and make use of the library resources. It is the duty of a librarian especially in public libraries to convert non-users or on-lookers into potential and habitual users of the library (Kumar & Phil, 2009). Deviant act span across all categories of users in as much as they have contact with the library and deviant act is evident in all types of libraries.

Many studies have been carried out to investigate the various forms and causes of deviant act in library, they include: throwing out books and other information resources through windows at night during power outage; carrying books and other information resources out of library without getting them properly charged out; tearing off pages of books and other information resources; using chemicals to clean off library ownership stamps in books and removing date due slips; removing the jacket cover and preliminary pages of books so that those books cannot be identified; stealing other registered library user borrowers' tickets and using them to borrow books; users conniving with some library staff such that a user can be issued with more tickets than allowed by the library; user borrows a book legally, goes out of the library, removes the date slip, comes back to the library, removes the date slip of the book intended to be stolen, uses a gum to affix the date due slip to create the impression that it is a legally borrowed book etc.

Many causes of deviance in the library have be identified Ajegbomogun (2004); Agboola (2001); senyah (2004); Akussah and Bentil (2010) among many others to

include: economic depression, scarcity, inadequate photocopying facilities, lack of, or few copies of a particular demanded material etc. it must however be mentioned at this juncture that many of the causes of deviant act stem from the negligence of the library management system and the activities of library staff. Porous library security system, lack of theft consciousness, absence of regular stock taking, no man's property syndrome to act perpetuated by the library staff themselves are among the discovered factors (Ewing, 1994; Omoniyi, 2001, and Gerlenter, 2005). A number of researchers have confirmed that library staff are also guilty of anti-social act in the library as they sometimes misuse their authorities. According to Holt (2007) as cited in Akussah and Bentil (2010), every profession has its "closed areas" which are little studied or discussed publically. This is because actions around issues as this may be complicated. This study however, wishes to view some deviant control measures put in place in the library to curb deviant and effective these measures have been at controlling deviant act among library users, not leaving some actions of the library staff that can consciously or unconsciously lead to increase in deviant acts among library users.

Deviance and Control Theory Perspective

Many theories of deviance have been identified; more important to the discussion of the study is the "Control theory" which emphasize internal and outer factors to the control of deviant act among people. This theory was developed by a sociologist Travis Hirschi in 1969 and Walter Reckless(1973), the control theory based its arguments on the fact that before we say people do not conform, we need to look into why some other people conform. People may want, at least some of the time, to act in deviant ways, but most do not. They have various restraints, internal controls such as conscience, values, integrity, morality and the desire to be good persons; also, is the outer controls (control agencies and mechanisms put in place), such as police, organization restraints policies, family, friends and religious authorities (Hirschi 1969; McShane and Williams 2007) Hirschi links conformity (internal factors) to four different types of social control:

1. Attachment – Attachment says that a strong bond one keeps with people encourages conformity. Weak family bond, peer and school relationships make people to deviate. Such a person with strong attachment is likely to listen to good opinions from the people his is attached to and will not want them to have bad opinion about him.
2. Involvement – This says that if a person is so involved in activities that make him conform, the less likely he is to deviate or nurse a thought in that direction. An idle hand they say is the devil workshop.
3. Investment and opportunity– This explains the kind and level of investment one has made in his life. One who has invested more in the process of his rising will not want his reputation tarnish. Opportunity explains the access and advantage a person has to legitimate things. A person so assured of future success will likely not deviate.
4. Belief – Socialization has thought us about the norms of the society, conventional morality and respect for authority. The strong ground one takes about these believes will affect and influence his conformity.

Outer control according to Reckless (1973), however looked beyond the inner and social affiliations a person has but, to issues within the social realm, the control mechanism put in place

by the society, organization, library, etc, to forestall deviant act; effectiveness of the agencies (police and law enforcement agencies, libraries) charged with upholding the law; efforts of religious organizations; family and friends in curbing deviant acts. A look then is required into various efforts of the library to control the outer factors which it has influence on. Many of the deviant acts perpetuated by users in the library were carried out because of the tendencies of not being caught when the crime is committed; many users willingly want to commit a deviant act to prove the porosity of the security measures of the library and to make the library keep alert, others because that are hardened criminals. Many libraries do not have well defined and active disciplinary measures to be meted out to abusers; many do not have collection protection strategies; most libraries have no adequate security for library materials; and, more importantly is the activities of library staff in contributing to crimes committed in the library, both professionals and Para-professional librarians are often times involved (all cites from CliffsNote. Com and National Council for the Social Studies, 2010).

The application of Control theory in the library

This shall be examined in three folds namely: education of users and socialization, security measures, and discipline and punishment. Parents help their children to develop self-control by socializing them, supervising them and punishing their deviant acts (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Church et al. 2009). This can also be applied in the library.

User education and Socialization: User education has so many advantages and objectives. Broadly, it is a means to bring awareness or to guide the users about library facilities, collections, services etc for new and old users, this type of guidance is necessary (Kumar & Phil, 2009). Academic libraries understand the need for students to be able to obtain, use and apply information to be successful. An organization that offers goods or services for sale recognizes the importance of making the customer aware of opportunities for spending money. Similarly, library should make its users aware of the resources and services that are offered, where to find them, and how to exploit what is available (Bello, 2003).

A survey of literature revealed the importance of user education in academic libraries. User education is believed to improve user's skills in exploiting library resources and services which can lead to greater use of the library. Bello (2003) in his conclusion indicates that a greater percentage of the respondents agree that user education courses have to a great extent benefited them in the proper handling and use of the library resources. Oyesiku, Buraimo and Olusanya (2012) in the summary of their studies mentioned lack of library use orientation as one of the major causes of user delinquency in the library. Akussah and Bentil (2010) in their study recommended library orientation and awareness programme for new and old users, they said the use of signs, notices, circular and newsletters would be of help. Mutilated materials should be exhibited with focus on the damages done, and how expensive it will be to repair or replace them. They also said that disciplinary measures relating to theft, document mutilation, and refusal to return borrowed books and keeping books long after they are due should be included in the user education and must be enforced.

Security measures: Effectiveness of the security measures put in place in the library will determine to a large extent if law and order would be upheld in such a library or not. The

question is “why do people keep to law and order in a country and suddenly become loose in other country?” the answer however is seen in the effectiveness of the agencies and security measures in these countries. The library as an agent of information dissemination must stand against the threats lunched at its resources by users. This can be done if adequate and effective security measures are in place in the library. Improved supervision was the highest in the responses on security of library materials in Akussah and Bentil (2010). The library can ensure security in the library by:

- Installing surveillance cameras;
- Improved library supervision;
- Motivating janitors and security officers for improved work performance;
- Effective user search strategy;
- Installing electronic theft detectors;
- Constant library stock taking and record keeping;
- Installation of radioactive device in books, etc.

Discipline and Punishment: Sociologist scholars have identified four basic reasons for punishment: they said punishment is meant for retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation and for societal protection. Retribution as a justification for punishment is an act of moral vengeance, this is when the offender is made to suffer as much as the crime committed, punishment for deterrence, is when such is carried out to discourage potential offers from committing such crime. Unlike the suffering championed by retribution and deterrence, rehabilitation seeks to provide a platform for offenders to learn acceptable behaviour, to correct and encourages constructive improvement. Finally, punishment like banning offenders from the society or total conferment of the offender can help protect the society of future occurrence. Libraries can punish deviants in justification of all or any of the mention reasons, discipline and punishment must include library staff who are partners in crime. Many studies have suggested means of punishing deviants act in library (Awujoola, 2013; Ajegbomogun, 2004; Akussah and Bentil, 2010; Bello, Opaleke2002; Bello, 1997, Lorenzen, 1997). They concluded that punishment in library should include:

- Making the offender to pay for the full cost of abused materials;
- Banning of offenders from the library;
- Public display of users identities as the case may be;
- Suspension of abuser for certain period of time;
- Making offenders both staff and users to face disciplinary committee;
- Expulsion or termination of appointment as the case may require;
- operating a stringent charging and discharging policies which check both staff and users alike;
- Making a deviant users to work for the library for a specific time (parole);
- Rewards for conformers.

Challenges

The major challenge to the operation of control theory in the library could be an attribute of dwindling budget of the library to procure information resource protection devices. Others are the nature of the library that want to as much as possible encourage library use by users and not discourage them, Few number of staff employed in the library that are saddled with more work than necessary, the no man’s property syndrome, ineffective methods of educating users. All

these and many more keep the library bowing down to incidences of deviant act and its recurrence in the library.

Prospects

Because the majority of the library stock are print materials which are susceptible to abuse, the application of control theory will help reduce the occurrence of deviant act in the library, proper socialization will help to build self control in students, it will help to unravel the areas of library weakness so that it can work to strengthen them, the application of the theory will make library staff to be conscious as they also stand to be punish when involved in the deviant act. Library stand to achieve its objectives, materials are safe and prolonged for future use, users enjoys library resources for personal and research purposes.

Conclusion and recommendation

The abuse of library materials and deviant act among users has pose great concern to the library, this however is a result of the poor strategy of protection employed by the library, it is on this note that a new and proactive method of deviance control is affirmed to be inevitable. The library should therefore put an active protection strategy on ground that will guard against deviant act among users and even staff. The writer recommends that user education and socialization be made effective and content packed, modern theft detector devices be installed, regular stock taking be ensured and finally, the library should invest more in procurement of electronic resources which are less susceptible to abuse.

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