Trust and Academic Libraries: An under-graduate college experience of India

Basudeb Adhikary[1]; Dr. Swapna Banerjee[2]; Sarmistha Adhikary[3]

Librarian, Netaji Mahavidyalaya, Arambagh, Hooghly, West Bengal, India [1]; Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, University of Calcutta, India[2]; Librarian, A. K. P. C. Mahavidyalaya, Bengai, Hooghly, India[3]

basudebadhikary@rediffmail.com

ABSTRACT

Trust is an important binding force in society. Without the presence of it, the relational fabric of the society would be distorted. Trust can be present among individuals as well as between individual and institutions. In the present study, we are interested in the relation between trust and academic libraries – one of the oldest social institutions of the world. We have done our study upon students of an undergraduate college and their responses were recorded regarding twenty six variables in a four point Likert scale. We did correlation analysis of the data set and tabulated them. We found a strong to moderate correlation between academic library outcomes and trust.

KEYWORDS: Academic Library, Library outcomes; Trust; Inter-personal Trust; Institutional Trust; Correlation Analysis**.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Human interaction forms an important part of library activities. It is possible between two individuals like a user and a staff / user or among a group of individuals like among library users. Now, for any positive and fruitful interaction, there should be some social relations among the individuals concerned with the interaction. The social relation is usually built by some underlying glue like mutual trust, social norm and network. Among these elements, Georg Simmel [1] conceptualised trust as one of the most important synthetic forces in the society. Trust is also important as it forms a basis for social capital. Robert Putnam [2] defined social capital as a feature of social organization as trust, norm and network that can improve the efficiency of the society by facilitating coordinated action among the members of the society and strive towards achieving a shared objective. Francis Fukuyama [3] explained social capital as the capability, which arises from the prevalence of trust in society or in some part of it. Trust can be explained as an expectation that others will contribute to the well being at individual level and in group level or at least will not do any harm. Offe [4].

The concept of trust can be classified by the application of two characteristics like – by radius of trust and by sources of trust. The first category of trust can be of two types depending upon their social scope and coverage –

generalized trust and particularized trust (Yamagashi & Yamagashi [5]; Whiteley [6]; Stolle [7]; Uslaner [8]). Particularized trust is the trust found in close social proximity i.e. among the familiar individuals like family members, neighbors, friends and colleagues. Whereas the generalized trust represent abstract attitude towards people in general including strangers i.e. people beyond familiarity. Yamagashi & Yamagashi termed them as knowledge based trust i.e. trust on people we know and general trust i.e. trust in people in general. Robert Putnam [9] divided trust into two segments like thick trust and thin trust. Thick trust is the trust enjoyed among a small radius of people – to only close people. Thin trust is the trust among the people with a larger radius – socially distant people. These nomenclatures have a similarity. Particularized trust is similar to knowledge based trust and thick trust whereas, generalized trust has similarity with general trust and thin trust. The second category of trust originates from the institutions. While the first one refers to the trust in people, the second category refers to the trust in public institutions run by the individuals or group of individuals. Libraries from the time immemorial, has been regarded as one of the most important social institutions. For smooth functioning of the library in society, both interpersonal and institutional trust is necessary. Let us take a simple example. A first year student of a college visits the college library with a specific information requirement. He asked reference staff or any other library staff about the information. The reference staff provides him the response. Now, two situations may arise. In first situation, the information turns out correct and the fresher gets immensely benefitted. His trust upon the library in general and the staff specifically grows multifold. The incident marks the initiation of a warm and cordial relationship. But, in second situation, the information turns out to be incorrect. The student will feel betrayed; distrust grows in him about the person in specific and the library in general. Not only this, the student will create a negative publicity of the institution among his friends. This will initiate a cold and negative relationship between the student and institution. Sense of betrayal is important in case of the institutional trust.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There are a number of studies associated with trust in libraries – specifically public libraries. But, there is hardly any paper on trust in academic libraries. In this paper, we try to **find out the relation between the trust and academic library outcome**. We did our survey in an under-graduate college – Netaji Mahavidyalaya situated in Arambagh sub-division of Hooghly district in West Bengal, India. As survey population, we have randomly chosen 251 students from final year of graduation.

3. SURVEY OF LITERATURE

This literature study is divided into two sections – library outcomes and trust and library. It is worth mentioning here that we are basically interested in library outcome rather than library output. The difference between output and outcome contains conflicting area. Most of the governments and funding agencies want reports as output format and considers it vital for the continuation of grants or funds. But on the other hand, governments of some advanced countries and non-governmental agencies consider outcome as more important than output. Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) [10] defined Outcomes, as the ways in which library users are changed as a result of their contact with the library's resources and programs. Satisfaction on the part of a user is an outcome, so is dissatisfaction. Deborah Mills in Harvard Business Review, rightly explained output is extrinsic and outcome is intrinsic in nature. In the non-profit world of libraries, outputs are the quantitative figures like number of books issued, gate count over a certain period of time etc., whereas outcomes are the knowledge transferred and society and behavior changed by utilizing that knowledge. Here outputs are products and services and outcomes create meanings, relationships and make the difference between users and non-users. It is true that, output enables one to

get funding for the library; at the same time it is also true that without outcome, there is no need of the output (Mills-Scofield, 2012). [11]

Outcomes again can be classified into two groups. When, impacts coming out of any specific library program are being considered, it is known as specific outcome. On the other hand, when general benefits, resulting out of library use are considered, it is known as 'general benefit'. In this paper, we are interested in library outcome – what the users think about the social benefits of an academic library – is it only academic or other social benefits are also there. It is also intended to identify the major areas of benefits which can be availed through the use of the library. ACRL [12] opined that outcome assessment of academic libraries should be able to answer six (6) broad questions like improvement in academic performances; increased academic success rates; improvement of chances in getting successful career; higher levels of information literacy; use of library as integral part of the course; and last but not the least 'Are students who use the library more likely to lead fuller and more satisfying lives?'.

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [13] published a document known as Alexandria manifesto. In that document they identified democracy, information literacy, intellectual freedom, information equality, reduction of poverty and cultural diversity as the benefit of library use.

Poll & Payne identified general outcomes or benefits of library use as knowledge, information literacy, higher academic and professional success, social inclusion and individual well-being. They also pointed out some characters of output like un-predictable, addition to past experiences rather than a radical change in attitude; solely depends upon the psychology of the users; visible only in long term developments (Poll & Payne, 2006). [14]

Vakkari & Serola [2012] conducted a study on public libraries in Finland. They proposed 22 areas of general benefits where a library can leave a lasting impression. They again grouped these areas into four broad groups like benefits in everyday activities; work & business, leisure and education (Vakkari & Serola, 2012). [15]

They again conducted another study on Norway – Netherlands – USA – South Korea comparative public library outcome in 2014 & 2016. In this cross country comparative study, they found out that users get benefits in self education, reading, history and society aspects. Now, the major benefits may vary from country to country (Vakkari P. , 2016). [16]

In 2017, Tzu-Tsen Chen & Hao-Ren Ke conducted another study on Taiwan public library outcomes. They conducted the study from the guidelines provided by Vakkari & Serola. They identified self-education, educational opportunities, reading fiction and reading non-fiction as most prominent outcomes of the Singang Public Library (Chen & Ke, 2017). [17]

Andreas Varheim [18], discussed about the study of social capital in public libraries. There he put emphasis upon trust creating capacity of public libraries as follows: "as open places, public libraries have potential for accommodating diversity in patrons, for contributing in promoting trusting relationship between diverse people, and as a result of these, learning process creates trust towards people in general."

Rothstein and Stolle [19] argued that impartial, uncorrupt and fair public policies and public institutions enhance trust in policies and institutions and that this trust spills over in generalized trust. So, according to these researchers, institutional trust slowly but gradually gets converted into generalized trust.

Barcelona Province Municipal Libraries [20] explained the importance of public libraries in creating trust as follows: "in times of crisis, the library becomes an extremely important community agent, counteracting the weakness of the traditional social networks as greater level of social fragmentation." It is particularly in this context, where generating trust in library service is essential for creating social capital in the community.

Johnson and Griffis [21] conducted a study of library use and social capital. Findings of that study show a strong relationship between indicators of social capital and library use. Frequent library users also emphasized important social benefits they gain from the library use.

Svendsen [22] has shown in a study that public libraries contribute to the formation of social capital including trust. Tzu-Tsen Chen & Hao-Ren Ke [23], tried to find out the relation between the public library and social capital. In the present study, the variables of trust are chosen from this paper.

4. METHODOLOGY

Library outcome is composed of nineteen (19) variables like project, self education, educational opportunity, formal education, job skills, job search, sports, outdoor, nature, health, social grant, hostel, household, cultural activity, creative activity, social relation, societal discussion, society and history and pleasure reading. These nineteen variables can again be grouped like Academic variables (project, self education, educational opportunity, formal education); Social indicator variables (social relation, societal discussion, society and history); Abstract Variables (cultural activity, creative activity, pleasure reading); Economic variables (social grant, hostel, households, job search, job skill); External variables (sports, nature, outdoor, health).

Trust is composed of seven (7) variables as follows:

I trust library staff: under this variable, we intend to know that if there exist any relationship of trust between the student and library staff. Initially, both of the parties were unknown to each other, but, gradually became known over time. This is the generalized trust turning out particularized trust.

I trust library users: Under this variable, we tried to know if the students trust their fellow users – who happens to be studying in the same class or in the same college or may live in the same locality. These two variables represent interpersonal trust.

Library is an essential facility in college: In this variable, the students were asked if they believe that library is an essential facility of the college. It shows the level of trust the students have upon the library. It represents the institutional trust the users have.

The library is for everyone: The library should welcome everyone affiliated or associated with the institution irrespective of any biasness. In this variable, the respondents are asked if they feel unwanted or feel overwhelmed by the library.

The library is a place where students from different ideologies gather: Students may believe in different ideologies – political, cultural, ethnological etc. But their belief in different ideologies will not bar them from the library. Even, library may become a place of exchange of opinion where every student will be free to express his or her opinion regarding different ideologies.

The library is a safe place: Here respondents are asked about how safe they feel inside the library. Whether they are barred from expressing their free opinion or allowed without any hindrance.

The library is a critical link between college administration and student community: There may be hundreds of reasons why a student will think twice before approaching the administration of the college. Under this item, respondents are asked if they feel free in expressing their problem to the library staffs. These five variables represent institutional trust.

We adopted the questionnaire based survey method to collect the data in a predefined questionnaire. We collected the data in four point Likert scale where 4 stands for Always, 3 for seldom, 2 for sometimes and 1 for never for the above mentioned twenty six variables of library outcomes and trust. The data was fed into an excel sheet. A correlation analysis was conducted to find the correlation strength between each pair of variables. We followed the accepted guidelineof interpreting the strength of correlation coefficient as follows:

The values between 0 and +3 (or -3) indicate a weak positive or negative linear relationship. The value between 0.3 (or -0.3) and 0.7 (or -0.7) indicate a moderate positive / negative linear relationship. The value between 0.7 (or -0.7) and 1 (or -1) indicate a strong positive / negative linear relationship through a firm linear rule. Ratner [24].

5. DATA ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

	Formal education	Project	Self Education	Educational Opportunity
I trust library staffs	0.43807014	0.45088352	0.6954869	0.35518738
I trust library users	0.36887538	0.37811222	0.54055571	0.28046388
Library is an essential facility	0.76104823	0.76422491	0.56911357	0.5343252
Library is for everyone	0.57685154	0.58007925	0.413566	0.37404839
Library is a place where student of different ideologies gather	0.26699214	0.25413949	0.30533015	0.14039492
The library is a safe place	0.58293179	0.60112948	0.49639488	0.37675403
Library is a critical link	0.20965472	0.21640368	0.35934164	0.25086087

Table 1: Co-relational strength between Academic variables and other variables of Trust

Among the academic variables, formal education and project have direct link with academic curriculum as well as examination and evaluation system of the undergraduate students of the college. Educational opportunity related information requirement generally deals with an under-graduate student's future requirements regarding further study. Self education generally deals with the self motivated learning of an individual. Formal education and project have strong positive linear correlation with 'Library is an essential facility'. As it is a part of syllabus or it is curriculum dependent in nature, for the fulfilment of course, students seek the help of the library and automatically feel that library is an essential facility of the college or academic system. It has moderate correlation with 'Library is a safe place', 'library is for everyone', 'I trust library staff' and 'I trust library users'. This has weak positive correlation with 'library is a place where people from different ideologies gather' and 'library is a critical link' between the student and administration of the college. Self education or self-motivated learning has moderate linear positive correlation with all the variables concerning trust. Among all variables, 'I trust library staff' enjoys highest correlation coefficient with self education. Actually, a user finds a trustworthy guide in a library staff in the pursuit of self learning. Educational opportunity has weak linear correlation with 'library is a critical link', 'library is a

place where student of different ideologies gather' and 'I trust library users'. With other variables, educational opportunity enjoys moderate linear correlation.

	Hostel	**Job Skill**	**Job search**	**Social Grant**	**Household**
I trust library staffs	0.19551368	0.59254229	0.22741188	0.19665258	0.24496817
I trust library users	0.19073816	0.45159053	0.25598354	0.22153875	0.26009216
Library is an essential facility	0.28757942	0.47627037	0.31375868	0.28484223	0.3103597
Library is for everyone	0.29041939	0.36112279	0.3249724	0.26094978	0.31036849
Library is a place where student of different ideologies gather	0.23113995	0.26248193	0.28174045	0.28789659	0.26697898
The library is a safe place	0.30287872	0.42067507	0.33475135	0.30893035	0.32752535
Library is a critical link	0.71353736	0.36595716	0.77051162	0.865873	0.77203929

Table 2: Co-relational strength between economic variables and other variables of Trust

The five variables – job search, job skill, social grant, hostel and household are bracketed as economic variables. These variables – specifically first three – job search, job skill and social grant have direct relationship with the economic condition of the candidate. Social grants are various scholarship schemes meant for the meritorious students or all students of socio-economic backward or minority community. These schemes actually help the students who are from economically backward families in continuing their study. Social grant has strong linear correlation with 'Library is a critical link'. The students believe that the library will act as a critical link between them and the college administration. Library can provide them the information or it can provide them the direct help in getting the social grant. It has weak linear correlation with other trust related variables. Actually college does not impart them any formal job skill acquiring related training. So, the students have to trust the library staffs to select the study materials. Job search has strong positive linear correlation with 'library is a critical link'. It enjoys moderate and weak linear positive correlation with other variables of trust. Hostel and household have followed the same trend as other variables of economic construct.

	Health	**Sports**	**Outdoor**	**Nature**
I trust library staffs	-0.0334149	-0.0441889	-0.0441043	0.03932765
I trust library users	-0.0001035	0.06536992	0.01090435	0.02017849
Library is an essential facility	-0.0809856	0.03919396	0.04086611	0.00919079
Library is for everyone	-0.0519171	0.0654189	0.01636876	0.0364134
Library is a place where student of different ideologies gather	0.23383135	0.31011331	0.31204695	0.35174528
The library is a safe place	-0.08081	0.05493454	0.0322126	-0.0028328
Library is a critical link	-0.0426779	0.0188013	-0.0873537	-0.0220468

Table 3: Co-relational strength between Field related variables and other variables of Trust

Sports, outdoor, nature and health – these four variables are considered as field related variables. These variables have weak positive and negative linear correlation with the variables of trust with one exception that 'Library is a place where student of different ideologies gather'. All these four variables have moderate linear correlation with

this trust related variable. This shows one thing that, affiliation to different ideologies does not affect the participation in field related activities. For other variables, it would be prudent to say that, the present study is unable to find out much relation between the trusts related other variables and outdoor related variables.

	Creative activity	Cultural activity	Pleasure reading
I trust library staffs	0.53151987	0.63185245	0.52596051
I trust library users	0.48809575	0.48498211	0.44837391
Library is an essential facility	0.54517654	0.63644	0.61007446
Library is for everyone	0.47098227	0.54363562	0.50581502
Library is a place where student of different ideologies gather	0.34936132	0.3559515	0.42116042
The library is a safe place	0.51722696	0.52857802	0.54714321
Library is a critical link	0.32263803	0.34173256	0.31023879

Table 4: Co-relational strength between Abstract activity and other variables of Trust

Abstract variables consist of three variables – cultural activity, creative activity and pleasure reading. An individual, when expresses his or her abstract feelings, he or she can build something or make something like painting or may perform some form of art. They can also read some out of syllabus books for simply entertainment purpose. All these three variables have moderate positive linear relationship with all variables of the construct - Trust. Cultural activity maintains strongest correlation with 'I trust library staffs' and 'Library is an essential facility'. Creative activity also maintains strongest correlation with the same variables of trust. Whereas, pleasure reading – the variable has strongest relation with 'Library is an essential facility' and 'The library is a safe place'. So, we can see that, the three variables accept that library is an essential facility of the college and people trust the library staffs.

	Social Relation	Societal discussion	Society and History
I trust library staffs	0.50821528	0.48952157	0.54061283
I trust library users	0.35575133	0.40543671	0.42185186
Library is an essential facility	0.43586083	0.33115038	0.44920395
Library is for everyone	0.34183233	0.32235215	0.37958442
Library is a place where student of different ideologies gather	0.36470572	0.27261968	0.38916875
The library is a safe place	0.41124202	0.34395919	0.40423247
Library is a critical link	0.27634334	0.27283068	0.29490946

Table 5: Co-relational strength between Social indicator variables and other variables of Trust

Social indicator variables include social relation, societal discussion and society and history. Under this variable, we intend to study the social consciousness of the students. All the variables maintain moderate correlation with the variables describing trust except 'Library is a critical link'. It can be seen from the table 5 that, they have strongest correlation with 'I trust library staffs'.

CONCLUSION

In case of academic variables, respondents have shown trust in institutions. They maintained strong to moderate positive linear correlation with 'Library is an essential facility'. They also felt that library is a safe place and for every student irrespective of any socio-economic and academic status. Economic variables also put emphasis upon institutionalised trust that 'Library is a critical link'. Now, the difference between library as a facility and as a link lies in the outlook of the users. From academic point of view, library is an accepted facility which caters to the intellectual need of the users. Again from the economic point of view, library can act as a liaison between the student and the college administration. Here the managerial aspect of the library and library staffs come into play. Field related variables have some relation with 'Library is a place where student of different ideologiesgathers'. With other variables of trust, it shows weak or negative correlation. Abstract variables also reaffirmed the trust in institution by maintaining strongest correlation with 'library is an essential facility', 'I trust library staff' and the' library is a safe place'. Social indicator variables indicated another trend which shows that they trust library staff more than the institute. So, from the above discussion, it is seen that most of the variables concerned with library outcome have strong to moderate linear correlation with institutional trust and inter-personal trust. It can be concluded that the academic library outcomes maintain strong to moderate correlation with different types of trust.

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