

**AMERICAN CORNERS, A NEW SERVICE WITH A NEW TASTE IN
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: HOW COMMUNITIES ARE BENEFITING
FROM MZUZU UNIVERSITY AMERICAN CORNER**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to establish how communities in Mzuzu are benefiting from Mzuzu American Corner. This was a survey study that adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It attempted to answer three questions: what programs and services are offered at Mzuzu American Corner? What strategies does Mzuzu American Corner use to make its services unique? How are programs and services at Mzuzu American Corner benefitting the communities in Mzuzu? Quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel while qualitative data was analysed by Microsoft Word by the use of narrative texts. A total of 40 participants were purposively and conveniently selected to participate in the study. Findings have revealed that Mzuzu American Corner offers programs and services in five main core program areas: English Language Learning; Education Advising; Information about USA; Cultural Programs and Alumni Involvement Activities. Users like American Corner programs because they are educative, entertaining and capture the interests of the users. American Corners are designed to be attractive, engaging and comfortable. Users of American Corners testify that they find Mzuzu American Corner safe, where they can socialize and make friends. They learn more about America and get trained in computer, Internet use and other technologies. Apart from these, American Corner allows its users use its room for their programs free of charge; they learn and practice English language and connect with opportunities. This paper recommends that libraries and information centres should consider designing programs and services that are engaging to its users and make them share their view or debate on topical issues affecting them.

Keywords: *American Corner; Library Service; Library Innovation; Library Program*

Conceptual setting

The term “American Corners” and “American Spaces” will be used interchangeably in this study. The term “American Spaces” refers to a collection American Corners, Information Resource Centres, Bi-national Centres and American Centres which are all programs designed by the US State Department to provide the people of the host country with a window into American culture and values(Fialho,2013). American Corners serve as regional resource centres for information and programs highlighting American culture, history, current events, and government (US Embassy Democratic Republic of Congo, n.d.).

The heart of an American Corner is its commitment to providing public diplomacy programs that engage various local audiences. American Spaces serve to build bridges of understanding, collaboration and partnership between host countries and the United States of America (American Spaces 2016). In this regard, American Corners world-wide conduct programs to achieve the aforementioned mission. For example American Centre in Yangon organizes programs that support building of the foundation for voter education and democratic practices. Programs include English language classes, civil society training and club activities (American Embassy in Burma, n.d.).

In Ethiopia, speakers visiting American Corners discuss U.S. global policies; exchange students share experiences from the United States. They also conduct Digital Video Conferences that cover sensitive issues like HIV/AIDS and human trafficking. (American Corner Ethiopia). American Spaces in South Africa offer Classes and form clubs introducing new technologies, 21st century digital skills, academic resources, films, discussions and lectures on entrepreneurship; leadership, climate change, international affairs, and others (US Consulate and Embassy in South Africa, n.d.).

American Corner Kitwe in Zambia is a centre where students are provided access to new technologies like use of e-readers that are loaded with fiction titles to support book clubs while desktop computers and laptops are provided for surfing the internet. The corner also introduced a dedicated Maker Space area with materials to conduct regular and on-going Maker Space activities. Users learn about basic circuitry, computer coding, and robotics, among other activities (US Embassy in Zambia, n.d.)

American Spaces in Taipei conduct extensive programs including student educational advising, lectures on American culture, book discussions, story-telling programs, poster shows, maker programs and others (American Institute

in Taiwan, n.d.). To improve technology skills and chances of employability among the youth, students at the Lincoln Corner, in Kedah, Malaysia, learn to use a 3Doodler, a pen that creates 3-dimensional plastic objects. Using 3-D technology enables students to learn and understand concepts and build skills for sparking entrepreneurship interests and developing new products. American Space in Madrid among other programs hosts GirlsTech Camp, a three-month program that introduces middle school-aged girls to technology to motivate them to pursue careers in science and technology (American Spaces 2016).

More importantly American Corners help to serve disadvantaged communities. For example public schools whose students have little access to technology and resources visit Centro Cultural Sampedrano binational centre in Honduras to attend EducationUSA program that provides information about opportunities to attend college in the United States. This centre also provides the “Access Micro-scholarship” program that offers intensive English learning through after-school programs to students age 13-20 (US Embassy in Honduras, (n.d.); American Spaces, 2016). American Corners build future leaders for example one user at American Corner Batumi testified having been connected to American Colleges and Universities where he got admission and financial assistance to American university (US Embassy in Georgia, American Corner Batumi, n.d.). On the other hand, American Corner Bangui in the Central African Republic targets the youth to offer them trainings, events and information about the U.S. (American Spaces, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The importance of ensuring that research is guided by theories cannot be over-emphasized. Lester (2005) postulates that theoretical frameworks offer guidelines to answer the why questions which do not have to be simply speculated by the researcher from the outcomes of the study. This study adopted the “Attraction Theory” proposed by Arosen in 1980, which postulates that one is attracted to others on the basis of: *physical appearance and personality*, *proximity* (liking others who are physically close to us), *similarity* (liking others who are like us), *familiarity* (liking those who have frequent contact with us), *reciprocity* (liking others who like us) and *barriers* (liking others we cannot have) (Shanthakumar and Xavier, 2001, p.27). According to this theory, if relations give us more rewards and pleasure than cost and pain, we will like those relations and wish them to continue. In this vein, library users (customers) are attracted to physical attractiveness of service, rewards that customers get from the services and pleasure that is associated with the service and closeness of service to individuals.

Contextual setting

Mzuzu University American Corner was officially opened by the Ambassador of the United States of America on 24 October 2005. The American Corner at

Mzuzu University primarily serves a community of about 4,500 students, 200 academic staff members and about 300 non-academic staff from Mzuzu University. In addition, the Corner also serves the surrounding communities of about 160, 000 people in the city of Mzuzu and other users from the Northern Region of Malawi. There is no other centre in the Northern Region of Malawi that can provide comprehensive information about the US and Education Advising Services to those aspiring to study in the US apart from Mzuzu University American Corner. (US Embassy in Malawi, n.d.).

The introduction of major service companies (such as Auction Holdings, Southern Bottlers, Mzuzu University, Mzuzu High Court, Department Stores, Mzuzu Central Hospital, Reserve Bank of Malawi) into the region is attracting more people into the city, hence need for more services. Therefore, the presence of American Corner in the city has brought more opportunities to the people of Mzuzu (US Embassy in Malawi Website). For example people are upgrading their qualifications, orienting themselves in the use of technologies and the establishment of book club at American Corner has encouraged building of reading and conversation skills, use of free online courses (Massive Open Online Courses -MOOCs), giving those with limited accessibility to education a chance to advance at very little expense to themselves. In addition, the Mzuzu University American Corner provides the general public with various services. The services offered include access to a wide range of print and electronic materials on USA, access to a public free Internet service, printing services, free Internet training, video shows, book discussions, workshops, meetings and exhibits. The centre is open to the general public. Mzuzu American Corner opens from Monday through Friday every day from 8.00 am to 4.30 pm. At first it used to open from 8.00am to 5.00 pm but since the Malawi Government changed official working hours, government institutions also followed suit. Therefore Mzuzu American Corner also changed its opening hours when Mzuzu University changed its official working hours (US Embassy in Malawi, n.d.).

Problem and Purpose of the Study

Introduction of American Corner at Mzuzu University Library and Learning Resources Centre in 2005 brought in new ways of information service delivery. Apart from the day to day provision of information access, American Corner at Mzuzu University provides topical programming services and sessions of technology training to its clientele. Unfortunately, no studies have been conducted to assess the service impact of American Corners in Malawi, specifically, the Mzuzu American Corner so that other information centres can learn from these experiences. This study was therefore conducted to reveal how the public is benefitting from the Mzuzu American Corner at Mzuzu University in Malawi. This study intended to determine how communities are benefitting from Mzuzu University American Corner programs and services in Mzuzu, Malawi.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What programs and services are offered at Mzuzu American Corner?
- What strategies does Mzuzu American Corner use to make its services unique?
- How are programs and services at Mzuzu American Corner benefitting the communities in Mzuzu?

Literature Review

Not much has been published on American Corners world-wide in peer-reviewed journals, however most of the literature this study has used comes from the authoritative American Spaces sites the world over. These have included reports and information from websites of different American Corners.

Services and Programs offered at American Corners

American Corners are spaces that offer public programming while supporting five core or principal programs: English language learning, Educational advising, Alumni activities, Cultural programs, and Information about the US (US Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria, n.d.). American Corners are the best places to find information on how to study in the U.S., US Visa information, educative videos, facts and statistics about the U.S. In all American Corners, users have free and open access to fast and reliable Internet. Apart from Internet access, American Corners provide training on how to use their resources and other technologies (Smithsonian Global, 2016; American Corners Fact Sheet, 2013).

Smithsonian Global (2016) has pointed out those visitors especially young people learn about U.S. build job skills and participate in dialogue with each other and Americans in a safe and free environment. In American Spaces young people discuss different issues affecting their social, political, cultural and educational life including anti-corruption issues, elections, women empowerment and entrepreneurship for social economic development. It is not uncommon to find the youth discussing issues on human rights, English language learning, studying in the US of America, bilateral relationships, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) and doing activities that foster critical thinking and problem solving. Users also discuss issues about environment, American Culture and values etc. (Office of American Spaces, 2016).

A study conducted by Chawinga and Ngwira (2015) found that American Corners act as centres where people learn and access technological services like Internet, photocopying, printing, scanning, computer trainings, watching DSTV

etc. In the same vein Asia-Plus Media Group (2017) found that American Corners are places where people access computers, interact with cutting-edge technologies. Additionally, Chawinga and Ngwira (2015) discovered that American Corners also provide cheap and high quality Internet services for example; they found that Mzuzu American Corner provided unbeatable high speed and reliable Internet in the whole of Mzuzu City. The same study also found that Mzuzu American Corner offers quality photocopying services due to the fact that its photocopiers are always properly serviced.

US Embassy, Zambia (2005) asserts that American Corner programs include but not limited to exhibitions, conferences, seminars, workshops, English language discussions, speaker programs, education advising etchant categorized 2005 annual report of American Corner Podgorica shows that American Corners offer programs like lectures that are organized on topical subjects like human rights, protecting Intellectual Property, climate change, understanding race, economic development etc. through which Americans and the host country subject experts present and openly discuss with the local audience. Good examples of topical lecture series programs American Corner Podgorica offers include human rights; understanding U.S. Foreign Policy; Screenings of documentaries and feature films, book presentations, Special programs (commemorative programs) etc.

A Smithsonian Global (2016) point out that one of the most innovative programs in American Corners is the Entrepreneur Incubator. This program equips participants with experiences and skills that help them in starting new business or finding new jobs.

Strategies that make American Corner programs and services unique

Engaging and Interactive Programs

America Spaces offer dynamic and interesting programming activities created to attract, engage and interact with the target audiences in dialogue and relevant to U.S. foreign policy and the host country. For example American Corner Astana (2017) emphasizes that active programming is what makes American Corner unique. The regular scheduled programs like discussion programs, debates, music, reading clubs, watching movies, kid's hour, presentations and lectures dedicated to specific events make American Corners a class of its own contrary to traditional library services and programs. Some of these scheduled regular programs are the commemorative events like holiday themed events: Earth Day celebration, Human Rights Day, Halloween, among others. (Ovidius University, 2014).

Tactful Advocacy

Secondly, tactful advocacy is another technique that American Corners use in order to attract and maintain the curiosity of its users. For example, American

Corner offers space to the general public to use to conduct their functions (U.S. Embassy Namibia, 2017). Once they come, they are introduced to programs and services American Corner offers. They are again assured that American Corner is their space which they can utilize. This makes the audience excited and willing to come and attend American Corner programs as well as use it for their programs and activities.

Open access

Open access is another approach that helps American Corners to attract and maintain its audience. According to Vision of Modern American Space, (2017) free or open access into the American spaces without appointment or advance security access request makes it a choice for many people to go and use American Corners. American Spaces are open to everybody regardless of race, political, cultural, religious, gender and physical orientations. In other words, the facility is open to everybody (Chawinga and Ngwira, 2015).

Offering of Free Internet and use of Other Technologies

The offering of free Internet access in American Corners attracts people from all different walks of life to come and patronized its services. American Corners offer free Internet access, with the best bandwidth and fast WIFI. Technology in American Spaces is of high quality and allows visitors to connect virtually with counterparts in other American Spaces, the region/country, the US to communicate and collaborate globally. American Corners on the other hand have competent staff who teaches users how to use different technologies. Users are encouraged to bring in and use their devices to make activities participatory, social and multiplying the impact. (Vision of Modern American Spaces, 2017).

Marketing strategy

Marketing strategy of using Smithsonian resources like furniture and room design as a promotional strategy has proved to be effective in attracting the audience to American Spaces. According to Office of the American Spaces Annual Report (2015), Smithsonian programming materials are a good example of materials that demonstrate how content, as well as design resources, available through the partnership can increase the appeal of programs to the general public. They make the American Space look beautiful and attractive to the users.

Maintaining a database of users

American Corner maintains a database of users who come to use American Corner programs. This directory/database is composed of names of the patrons, their contact details and which programs they attended. The database helps the corner management to know which people are interested in what programs.

Therefore, whenever, a program is being organized, these are the primary target audience. American Corners believe in interactive engagement with its audience in its programs. This approach helps it capture the interests of the users, understand user behaviour, and maintain strong relations with its customers. This results in having regular members who are loyal to its programs and activities. This is fundamental to the success of modern American spaces(American Spaces, 2017).

Outreach

American Corners have moved away from the notion of providing traditional library service model to be more dynamic, outreach-oriented, audience-focused, and distinctly American engagement platforms (American Spaces, 2017). American Corners do not wait for people to come and use their services but also goes to the people through outreach activities. This has been instrumental in attracting the audience to many programs and activities that are introduced to them during the outreach missions.

How communities benefit from American Corner Programs and services

American Corners serve a diverse background of users. Amongst them include decision-makers, opinion leaders, Journalists, academics, businessmen and women, civic organizations, teachers, students, government officials, military clergy and traditional rulers etc. (American Corners Fact Sheet 2013; LECIAD, n.d.). American Corners organize cultural events and activities, and also operate as a platform for joint programs.

Provision of Space/Room

American Corners/Spaces are centres where Americans meet with the host audience to discuss issues of mutual interest between American Embassy and the host institution. As such, American Corners offer meeting room/space available to host activities or programs (US Embassy Namibia, 2017). The same vein American Corner Belgrade in its service delivery provides associated reading, meeting and programming rooms that are made available to host program events and activities. These program activities are like workshops, speaker programs, film screenings, meetings and exhibits. (US Embassy, Ghana, n.d.; US Embassy Belgrade, 2017)

Lending Services

Any American Corner is a small cultural centre which works in a major library and provides a wide variety of information with the help of books and audio-visual resources etc. It is therefore not uncommon to find American Corner offering library services using its traditional and digital resources. For example American Corner Constanta in Romania functions as a regular library with loan and reference sections, so that the readers can either borrow books or consult

them on the friendly premises in the new campus of Ovidius University (US Embassy Romania, 2014). It should however be pointed out that all American Corner programs and activities are open to the general public. In other words, they are open and free for all. This tends to close a gap of information need for the communities surrounding since most American Corners are established in universities, Non-Governmental Organizations, Schools etc. (American Spaces Handbook, 2016) where access is limited a specified categories of users.

Learning and Promotion of English Language

American Corners promote English language learning by offering specific activities that aim at learning and practicing the language. For example, the American Corner at Rwanda Library Services provides free English language learning program that is aimed at building confidence of English speakers, especially non-natives, as well as acquiring conversational skills (WorldDenver, 2015). In 2012, the US Envoy to Rwanda launched a unique annual program called “Everybody Reads Rwanda.” This was a two-week program that aimed at promoting reading as an activity that can be shared by more than one person. In this reading program copies of the same book are circulated to students across the country, and schools host book discussions with help from the U.S. Embassy. In other countries, this program is achieved by “a Books Discussion Club”(WorldDenver, 2015). In American Corners, English teachers learn how they can present their lessons as well as communication abilities and English language competences in general (US Embassy in Romania, 2016).

American Spaces organize and conduct programs that are aimed at developing children’s literacy skills. For example, American Corner Romania conducts children programs that contribute to development of children’s early literacy skills and communication abilities (US Embassy in Romania, 2016). In American Corners, users improve their English proficiency through interactive activities and drills. For example American Corner in DRC, there are CD-ROMs that support several English learning interactive activities that are very much appreciated as they help improve American Corner’s users’ English levels (US Embassy Democratic Republic of Congo, 2017)

Learning about USA

According the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (2010), American Corners provide local populations with information about American culture and policies. The host institution and the general public access information from books, DVDs, magazines, computers and online databases on US culture, history, values etc. of the US. (US Embassy Namibia, 2017). On the other hand, people who patronize American Corners connect and learn about the US. At Cluj County American Corner in Romania citizens find answers to questions about the U.S. and issues of global concern such as human trafficking, climate change, economic welfare, and international security through speaker

programs, both in person and via digital video conferences (US Embassy Romania (2017)).

Connecting People to People

US Embassy in Serbia (2017) claims that there are over 400 American Corners around the world that provide friendly atmospheres where visitors can connect and learn about the US through print and electronic media such as books and magazines, Internet access, and engaging in-person and virtual programs. Most American Corners have Digital Video Conference capabilities, thus enabling embassies a rare opportunity of bringing American speakers to remote locations to facilitate interactions and sharing of ideas between American people and the host country citizens. (US Embassy Ethiopia, n.d.). Furthermore, American Corner Cluj County in Romania asserts that the American Corner Cluj is a space where local audience connect with American Citizen. Through their connections, they learn new skills about entrepreneurship (US Embassy in Romania, 2016).

Learning about Latest Technologies

Office of the American Spaces (2015) has pointed out in its annual report of 2016 that American Spaces are now moving beyond a focus on “mutual understanding” to become more dynamic and proactive platforms for convening discussion on issues relevant to U.S. foreign policy interests. To this end, they are employing the latest technology and focusing on user needs and mining programs that engages young Indonesians on issues of strategic importance. Cluj County American Corner Cluj-Napoca is a modern space is also a place where the young generation learn new skills or improve existing ones like how to use the latest technology (US Embassy in Romania, 2016). In the same vein, Asia-Plus Media Group (2017) observed that at American Corners, visitors access computers, interact with cutting-edge technologies.

Research Methodology

This was a survey study that utilized both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data collected from users of the American Corner using a questionnaire that was analysed quantitatively using excel application software and presented in tables. Qualitative data was analysed by Microsoft Word using narrative texts. A total of 40 participants were purposively and conveniently selected. Purposive sampling was used to capture opinions of frequent users of the American Corner who the author thought are conversant with American Corner programs and services. Therefore, teachers from 6 schools were purposively selected to participate in the study. Four primary schools and two secondary schools were selected because of their frequency in attending programs at the American Corner. Thirty (30) questionnaires were handed over to the headmasters, five at each school. The headmaster distributed

the questionnaires randomly and conveniently to any five teachers who were present on that day. The headmaster only gave the questionnaires to teachers who had ever escorted students to Mzuzu American Corner. Four (4) students Union leaders were also purposively selected and given questionnaires to respond to. Four (4) leaders of youth organizations who use the American Corner were also asked to respond to the questionnaire. Two (2) Library Managers from Mzuzu University Library and Learning Resources centre were interviewed. Results are presented below in the next section.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This section analyses, presents and discusses results emanating from data that were collected through questionnaires and interviews. A total of 40 questionnaires were distributed. A total of 36 questionnaires were returned. Four (4) were null and void because they were incomplete. Therefore, the total response rate was 85 percent from 34 questionnaires that were returned complete. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What programs and services are offered at Mzuzu American Corner?
- What strategies does Mzuzu American Corner use to make its services unique?
- How are programs and services at Mzuzu American Corner benefitting the communities in Mzuzu?

Programs and services are offered at Mzuzu American Corner

Library Managers were interviewed to highlight the main areas of programming at the Mzuzu American Corner and the following were their responses:

Respondent 1 verbatim

“ From what I know, Mzuzu American Corner organizes programs focusing on provision of information about America, helping students who are aspiring to study in the United States of America. It also holds commemorative holiday events like Black History Month, Earth Day, World Aids Day, Martin Luther King Jnr. birth day etc.”

Respondent 2 verbatim

“I have seen American Corner inviting people to its programs. I have attended some of the programs organized and they have included quiz contest (mathematics, English conversation, debates etc.). In some programs there are people who went to America speaking. I have also seen American Corner organizing public lectures on topical issues including panel discussions on climate change.”

These findings concur with what American Spaces (2017) and US Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria (n.d.) pointed out that in support of five core programs,

American Corners provide English language learning, Educational advising, Alumni activities, Cultural programs, and Information about the US. In addition, US Embassy in Zambia (2005) asserts that American Corner programs include but not limited to exhibitions, conferences, seminars, workshops, English language discussions, speaker programs, education advising etc.

Participants were also asked what programs and services they use when they come to American Corner. The table below presents the findings:n=34

Table 1: Programs and Services offered at Mzuzu American Corner

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Computer and Internet training	15	44
Mathematics quiz	12	35
Photocopying and printing	12	35
Watching films or videos	12	35
Attending programs on specific topics	9	26
Women History Month	9	26
World Aids Day	9	26
Studying in USA i.e. inquiring about scholarships, TOEFL, GRE and SAT tests	8	23
Attending conferences or seminars	7	20
Black History	7	20
Free Internet Access	7	20
YALI programs	6	17
English Learning program	7	12
International Day of the Youth	4	12
World Environmental Day	3	9
Entrepreneurship programs	2	6
USA Visa application process	2	6

Table 1 above shows that computer and internet training, mathematics quiz, photocopying and printing; watching films and videos; attending programs on specific topics; Women History Month commemorations are the most popular programs and services offered at Mzuzu American Corner. Following these are World AIDs Day commemorations, attending programs on specific topics, inquiring about scholarships TOEFL, GRE and SAT tests, Internet access, Black History Month Commemorations and attending conferences or seminars are programs and services users use at Mzuzu American Corner. Smithsonian Global (2016) supports these findings and has stated that at American Spaces visitors (mostly young people) appraise themselves about the United States of America, open access and free Internet, build job skills. Smithsonian Global points out that, one of the most innovative programs in American Corners is the Entrepreneurship Incubator that equips young people with experiences and skills that would help those starting businesses or finding new job skills. This finding ties well with the Attraction Theory (Shanthakumar and Xavier, 2001,

p)in that the services used attract users because most schools do not have such services in their schools (secondary and primary schools).Furthermore, American Corners conduct workshops that engage the youth in the ways that are relevant to them (also tying very well with similarity factor, and familiarity factor of the Attraction Theory that says people like those who like them and those who have frequent contact with them). These finding agree with findings of a study conducted by Chawinga and Ngwira (2015) that established that Mzuzu American Corner is popular because of its services like photocopying, printing and Internet among others that are distinguished from other service providers. For example quality of print outs from American Corner are of high quality because the machines are service regularly and toner is always available.

Strategies Mzuzu American Corner Uses to Make its Services Unique

Participants were asked what American Corner does to attract and maintain its audience to its services and programs. Below are the reasons that were solicited from teachers from the surrounding primary and secondary school:

- Programs are designed to attract and engage targeted audiences.
- Programs are participatory engaging users in dialogue and hands-on activities.
- Programs are designed to promote critical thinking and innovation.
- Programs and services promote thoughtful discussions of issues affecting users.
- American Corner create a register for program attendees to use for future programs
- Sending promotional material like flyers advertising programs in advance
- Users are told about education opportunities in the USA

The above findings are supported by American Spaces (2017) that asserts that American Spaces provide public diplomacy programming designed to attract and engage targeted foreign audiences in open, participatory dialogue and hands-on activities. They are designed, configured, and equipped to promote critical thinking, innovation, and thoughtful discussions among the youth. In the same vein this finding auger well with the attraction theory whose purpose is to attract customers to are ward and pleasure. People are attracted to things that give them rewards and pleasure (Shanthakumar and Xavier, 2001).

Participants were asked what they liked most about Mzuzu American Corner. The table below presents the findings:n=34

Table 2:Strategies American Corner Use for Successful Programming

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Programs are organized based on user interest	18	53
The environment is attractive	17	50
The facility is free and open to everybody.	16	47

The furniture is comfortable	16	47
Users were always invited to programs	16	47
Users learn computer and Internet technology	14	41
Customers are served with refreshments	12	35
Users are free to discuss issues that affect them in a free environment	12	35
Program offer topical and current issues affecting the targeted audience	12	35
Topics discussed are relevant and educative	10	29
Programs are interactive	6	16

Table 2 above shows that Mzuzu American Corner programs are organized on the basis of responding to users interest, making the environment attractive, making the facility free and open to everybody, (Office of American Spaces, 2015). In addition, the table also shows that American Corner furniture is very comfortable, users are always invited to special programs, users learn computer and Internet technology, users are free to discuss issues that affect them in a free environment, audience are served with refreshments to put in them in relaxed mood, users learn technology free of charge, users freely discuss issues without fear of being censored, issues discussed are topical, current, relevant and educative.

These findings agree with Smithsonian Institution's(2015).This strategy is based on the attraction theory which states that people are attracted to physical appearance of things(Shanthakumar and Xavier, 2001). Mzuzu American Corner ensures that American Corner environment is attractive by providing good furniture, equipment and staff who are welcoming and friendly. American Spaces Idea Book that reveals that Office of American Spaces and Smithsonian Institution partnered and came up with a project known as Model American Space Project whose aim is to design modern American Spaces as attractive, innovative and interactive as possible where users can express themselves freely in a relaxed mood. Smithsonian Global (2016) nails it down by revealing that the purpose of this partnership is to create spaces that inspire visitors and engage young people in ways that are relevant to them. It further informs us that even the American Corner content and design of resources is designed to increase the appeal of programs.

Library managers and leaders of some Youth NGO's were also asked what was it that was offered at Mzuzu American Corner that is not offered in traditional library service. Below were the responses:n=6

Table 3: Uniqueness of Programs and Services at Mzuzu American Corner

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Use of American Corner for educative and entertainment	4	100

Youth are trained in leadership skills to help them in life	3	75
American Corner is open to everybody	3	75
Users share ideas with foreign audience e.g. Americans	3	75
Users trained on entrepreneurial skills	3	75
Users connect with Americans and American Organizations	2	50
Users are trained in how to use new technologies	2	50
Users get free Internet access	2	50

Table 3 above shows responses on the uniqueness of Mzuzu American Corner from traditional libraries. The table shows that American Corner presents programs that are educative and entertaining, the youth are trained in leadership as well as entrepreneurial skills. The corner is also open to everybody contrary to traditional academic libraries that have defined users. Users at Mzuzu American Corner share ideas with the foreign audience and connect with Americans and American Organizations contrary to traditional libraries where users go there simply to read and borrow materials. Users at Mzuzu American Corner are trained in the use of new technologies, a service that is rare in many traditional libraries. Users at Mzuzu American Corner access unlimited free internet, a service that is controlled in many traditional libraries in Malawi. These findings are underpinned by the customer attraction theory in that the services provided at American Corner are helpful and rewarding to the users (Shanthakumar and Xavier, 2001). Ovidius University of Constanta (2014) has pointed out that American Corners offer feature and documentary films. These in most cases are educative and entertaining in nature and thus supporting the findings above. The findings are also supported by American Corner Belgrade (2017) that states that access to American Corner collections and services is free and open to all interested citizens. US Embassy in Nigeria (n.d.) adds to say that American Corners staff assists individuals how to use the resources provided in the American Corners, for example, books, magazines, computers and other new technologies. US Embassy in Nigeria (n.d.) points out further that in American Corner people connect with alumni and other foreign audiences to learn about their experiences in the United States of America.

How Communities are Benefitting from Mzuzu American Corner

Participants were asked how they benefit from Mzuzu American Corner programs and services. Below were their responses: n=34

Responses from teachers and students on how they benefit from the Mzuzu American Corner

Response	Frequency	Percentage
We feel safe, socialize and make friends	21	62

We discover and learn more about America	16	47
We are trained on computer and Internet use.	15	44
We use the American Corner room to conduct our programs	14	41
We learn how to keep ourselves safe from HIV/AIDS	14	41
We connect with opportunities, American people and organizations	10	29
We access Internet for free	10	29
We learn and practice English language	10	29
We learn how one can study in America	9	26
We are trained on entrepreneurship and leadership skills	15	15

The above table shows that users feel safe, socialize and make friends at American Corner, discover and learn more about America, get trained on computer and Internet use, use the American Corner room to conduct their programs, access Internet service for free, retrained on computer and Internet use, learn and practice English language, learn how one can study in America etc. These findings are supported by Fialho, (2013); Office of American Spaces (2015); US Embassy Belgrade, (2017); that has documented that in American Spaces, users interact with each other, build skills, learn English language, meet and interact with American experts or speakers, access free Internet, learn about health issues like HIV/AIDS etc. attraction theory anchors this finding well as people like the environment they are liked, associate with people who are like them and are in frequent contact with them(Shanthakumar and Xavier, 2001). The Mzuzu American Corner sets such an environment. The Mzuzu American Corner sets such an environment. Smithsonian Global (2016) narrate an experience of Liz Tunick Cedar when she visited American Space in Morocco, young adults shared with her, “This is where I feel safe, where I have made relations for life. It is my second home, my second family.” The findings are further supported by Smithsonian Institution (2015) that asserts that American Spaces are places to connect with peers, opportunity and America.

One of the frequent Mzuzu American Corner user commented, “I still value Mzuzu America Corner in my life. It is a place where my success in life emanated. I connected with one American who saw my plight in life. He offered to assist me and he has continued to do that to date. He said, “I will be sending you \$500 every month till I die.” That was starting point of my business. Now I import and sell vehicles.” On the other hand one journalist expressed his

appreciation to Mzuzu American Corner for providing fast and free internet access. He said, “When Mzuzu University will decide to close American Corner, we will go to the streets and march against the decision because we benefit so much as there is no any other reliable and better Internet service in Mzuzu than that at the Mzuzu American Corner.”

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study has established that communities in Mzuzu feel safe, socialize and make friends at American Corner. They also learn information about the United States of America, get free Internet access and computer training, learn and practice English language, get trained in entrepreneurial and leadership skills and others. The success of Mzuzu American Corner information Service hinges on its strategies of being attractive, interactive, engaging, and free and open to everybody. This has encouraged users to take ownership of the facility and use it as their own. Relevance of programs and activities to the audiences has made users to benefit from the American Corner immeasurably.

In addition, results of this study advises how librarians and other information providers can design unique information services that are engaging, interactive, informing, educative and entertaining in libraries apart from the traditional way of providing access to information. The results also inform how librarians and information providers can create a lasting and engaging link between themselves and the communities they serve. This study has also demonstrated how a model library outreach program can be designed.

This paper, therefore, recommends that libraries and information centres should designate specific spaces/rooms to discuss topical issues with its users. Experts in the field could be invited to such programs to facilitate the discussions. The discussions should be designed in such a way that they should be engaging, interactive and educative to address specific challenges communities are facing. Some programs should specifically target the youth because they do have unique information needs that require a unique way of addressing them.

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