
University Libraries in India and Electronic Journals: The Role of Consortia-based Subscription of E-journals for the Effective Use of Financial Resources

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Abstract

Higher education for the development of society is imperative because it not only emphasize on the need of creating the enlightened citizenry for the country but also establishes itself as a potential instrument of social and national reconstruction. Libraries function as an essential integral component in higher education system. Without a proper information and knowledge infrastructure, no education system can sustain and achieve its laid down goals and objectives. But in the past one-decade, due to paucity of funds, libraries are passing through a phase of deterioration, particularly in terms of its collection and services. Lot of efforts have been taken in past to over come the problem of financial crunch such as resource sharing, library networking etc. Advent of information and communication technologies and their capabilities such as high-resolution capture devices, dramatic increase of digital storage media, explosive growth of Internet and WWW, sophisticated search engines, fast-processing power and reducing cost of computers, high bandwidth networks and increasing number of electronic publications have made possible to switch over to technological solutions to the problems of present day university libraries which can not be won otherwise by the traditional system of librarianship. The present paper defines the term e-journals, illustrates the advantages of e-journals in the light of the financial problems, issues and implications, some acquisition considerations of e-journals and highlights the benefits of consortia based subscription of electronic resources.

Keywords : Electronic Journals, Consortia, University Libraries, Financial Management

0. Introduction

India has a large educational system comprising thousands of Colleges and hundreds of Universities along-with several Institutes of higher learning and Centers of excellence. The college and university libraries, being the nerve centres of the higher education and learning, play a vital role in support of all the activities such as teaching, research and publication. Our higher education system is passing through lot of problems due to economic recession and cost-recovery concepts. The college and university libraries in India are faced with the challenges to meet the user requirements due to various reasons such as exponential growth of knowledge, price escalation, budget restrictions. The increasing growth in the enrollment of students and researchers, lack of proper and adequate infrastructure further aggravates the overall problems and challenges for the college and university libraries. This situation has paved the way for serious thinking on the capabilities to compensate for reduced budgets. E-subscription is one of the emerging toolkit for libraries to survive in the present circumstances. The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India is helping colleges and universities to automate their libraries and over 150 university libraries have been provided with funds for establishing computer and communication network among the libraries under INFLIBNET programme. In addition, the UGC also making serious efforts to bring computer networking and Internet access to University and College campuses. It is expected that the UGC-Infonet would enable applications like e-access to journals, computer aided learning, distance education and E-governance to become a reality.

1. What is an e-journal ?

Electronic journal may be defined broadly as any journal, magazine, e-zine, webzine, newsletter or type of electronic serial publication which is available over the Internet and can be accessed using different technologies such as World Wide Web (WWW), Gopher, ftp, telnet, e-mail or listserv. The University of Glasgow [1] defines the term 'Electronic journal' as "Any journal that is available over the Internet can be called an 'electronic journal'. In some cases, print equivalents exist; in some cases, not. Some electronic journals are freely available; other has charging mechanisms of different types. Established publishers issue some; others are produced from an individual academic's office. As with print journals, the quality and relevance of e-journals can vary considerably". In simple words it is said that the electronic journals are the one where the text is read on, and /or printed from, the end-user's computer rather than as print-on-paper. In the online journal, the data is downloaded directly from the host computer rather than via an intermediate medium such as CD-ROM. Due to several advantages, number of electronic journals have grown in dramatic proportion from less than 10 in 1989 to more than 8,500 in April 2000. [2]. The 37th edition of the Ulrich's International Periodical Directory (1999) reports that of total 1,57,000 serials listed in the Directory, 10,332 are available exclusively online or in addition to its paper counterpart.

2. Advantages of e-journals

Following are the worth mention advantages of the e-journals.

1. Speed of access to the latest information
2. Ability to implement multimedia elements
3. Quick searching
4. Linking from and to other resources
5. Security
6. Single user or location restrictions do not apply
7. Downloading an article to a personal computer for later use or printing is easier than photocopying or scanning.

Liew et al [3] opined that the main advantage of e-journals over their print counterparts is that they are interactive, or at least offer an element of interactivity.

3. Consortia-based subscription to e-journals

"Library consortium" is well known in foreign library practices. Participation in a consortium has many advantages:

1. the pooling of expertise in the resolving of complicated tasks. For example, in the implementation of modern network applications;
2. the saving of precious personnel by the centralization of some of the common activities;
3. the realisation of financial savings through joint acquisitions and the dissemination of document databases, as well as in administrative and managerial work; and
4. a stronger position vis-à-vis vendors, whether in price negotiations or in other business dealings.

"Shared subscription" or "Consortia-based subscription" to electronic resources is a part of "Library Consortium" and it can be a viable solution in order to increase the access to electronic resources

across institutions at a lower cost. The libraries all over the world are forming consortia of all types and at all levels with an objective to take advantage of global network to promote better, faster and more cost-effective ways of providing electronic information resources to the information seekers. Consortia provide union strength to negotiate with electronic publishers for the best possible price and rights. Most publishers already have well-defined policies and offers for libraries subscribing as consortia. The collective strength of consortia members facilitates the libraries to get the benefit of wider access to electronic resources at affordable cost and at the best terms and conditions. The consortia licensing is widely used in the world over by the libraries and it is through slowly but gradually picking up in India. Initiatives in this direction by IITs, CSIR libraries, and now efforts by university and college libraries under INFLIBNET programme are most cited references.

It is now a known and established fact that the task of libraries and information centres in order to procure, organize and disseminate vast amount of information is becoming more and more difficult as they have to operate within the budgetary constraints. Also, the technology has changed expectations of researchers, their patience and their willingness to accept services that are available on demand. In other words, economic necessity created by the factors such as devaluation of rupee, price hike of journals, hike in conversion rates of foreign currency, decreasing library budgets etc. and information explosion has forced present day librarianship in India to find out the viable solution to these problems. It is in this context, the shared subscription or consortia-based subscription to electronic resources through consortia of libraries is a feasible strategy to increase the access to electronic resources across institutions at a lower cost. Thus, it can be successfully deployed to meet the pressures such as diminishing budget, increased user's demand and rising cost of journals.

The electronic resources are basically divided into two types: (i) Full text electronic resources, (ii) Electronic resources available through on-line databases. For the purpose of shared subscription of electronic journals following journals can be marked as the natural choice as they are most widely used and demand e-journals in the filed of science and technology.

1. IEEE Journals
2. Elsevier's Science Direct
3. Springer Verlag's Link
4. Applied Science and Technology Plus etc.

Whereas, under the category of On-line databases, library consortia may go for selecting and subscribing:

1. Compendex Plus
2. INSPEC
3. MathSciNet
4. Web of Science etc.

As have been earlier stated, that in India the concept of consortia-based subscription is very slow and a few efforts have been initiated in this direction. One of the worth mentioning efforts in this direction is taken by the IITs. In fact, the proposal for consortia-based subscription to electronic resources was first discussed at length at the "National Seminar on Knowledge Networking in Engineering & Technology Education and Research" held at the IIT Delhi between 1st to 2nd December, 2000. During this Seminar, one of the work groups of the seminar floated the idea of consortia-based subscription to electronic resources. A draft proposal was made and circulated among all IITs, IISc and RECs. On the basis of the feedback received from them, a revised draft proposal was sent to Ministry of Human Resource and Development (MHRD). The MHRD then appointed a "Committee of Experts on Consortia-based

Subscription to Electronic Resources for Technical Education System in India" which submitted its final report to the MHRD which was accepted and approved for implementation. Thus, a "Library Consortium" for the purpose of consortia-based subscription of electronic resources came into existence.

While discussing the role of consortia-based subscription of electronic resources, the "Committee of Expert on Consortia-based Subscription to Electronic Resources for Technical Education System in India" listed the following benefits: [6]

1. Consortia-based subscription to electronic resources would provide access to wider number of electronic resources at substantially lower cost.
2. The consortia, with its collective strength of participating institutions, have attracted lower rates of subscription with most favorable terms of agreement. Most e-publishers responded positively to the call of MHRD consortia. The rates offered to the consortia are lower by 50% to 90% depending upon the category of institutions. It may be noted that full-text resources and databases proposed for subscription various categories in the consortia would have cost Rs. 164 crores as per their list price, while through the consortia, the total cost comes to Rs. 18.60 crores for all institutions being considered under the consortia, a total overall saving of Rs. 145.6 crores.
3. The research productivity of all institutions is expected to improve with increased access to international databases and full-text resources.
4. The consortia is expected to trigger remarkable increase in sharing of both print and electronic resources amongst participating library through J-GATE Custom Contents for consortia (JCCC) proposed for subscription by the committee.
5. The consortia is proposed to be an open-ended venture where other institutions can join and get the benefit of not only the lower subscription rates but also the favorable terms and conditions.
6. Consortia members will also have the benefit of cap on the annual increase in the rates of subscription. While the usual increase in price of e-resources vary from 15 to 20%, the consortia would enjoy the cap on increase in price ranging from 6.5% to 9%.
7. The consortia have been offered better terms of agreement for use, archival access and preservation of subscribed electronic resources, which would not have been possible for any single institutions.
8. Since the subscribed resources would be accessible online in electronic format, the beneficiary institutions would have less pressure on space requirement for storing and managing print-based library resources. Moreover, all problems associated with print media such as their wear and tear, location, shelving, binding, organizing, etc. would not be an issue for electronic resources.

Similarly, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) also initiated such like efforts for the libraries of its several laboratories. The UGC-Infonet is also working in this direction. Several meetings on e-journals subscriptions during April-September, 2003 under UGC-Infonet-Consortium took place. For example, a meeting was held with the Chairman, UGC on April 30, 2003 to discuss the matter related to Internet connectivity and E-subscriptions to universities as a part of the UGC Infonet programme [7]. Another meeting was held on May, 2003 at Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR). Professor Ashok Raina, TIFR organized the meeting and discussed about the number of journals and databases to be subscribed under the consortia.[8].

4. Conclusion

Academic libraries in India are facing challenges due to budget cut, reduced staff, devaluation of rupee, steep hike in conversion of foreign currencies, and escalation in cost of publication. Due to the factors mentioned above, academic libraries are finding it difficult to buy required number of books and periodicals, which has resulted into the adverse impact on the research and development programmes. Realising the need for common mechanism for access to scholarly information, UGC set the priority for the academic and research community and initiated through INFLIBNET to explore the possibility of the

subscription of periodicals in the electronic format protecting the larger interest of the academic and research community in the country. The UGC has already initiated the process of computerization of university and college libraries, providing them Internet connectivity and now through UGC-INFONET is planning to provide them facilities like E-access to journals, computer aided learning, distance education and E-governance to become a reality. In addition, the UGC-INFONET is also exploring the possibilities to subscribe e-journals through a consortium to benefit college and university libraries in the country. Though consortia-based subscription to electronic resources can help college and university libraries in order to enhance their access capacity to large number of periodicals yet there is a need to develop a policy for consortia-based subscription to electronic resources which should clearly indicate the terms and conditions favouring and protecting the academic interest of the college and university libraries.

5. References

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