

By

Shivpal Singh Kushwah

Sci./Tech Officer -I

INFLIBNET Centre

*Opp. Gujarat University Guest
House, P B No 4116, Navrangpura*

Ahmedabad – 380009

Ashok Jambhekar

Librarian and Head, NICMAN

Vikram Sarabhai Library

Indian Institute of Management

Vastrapur

Ahmedabad - 380 015.

J.N. Gautam

Reader & Head

SOS Library and Information Science

Jiwaji University

Gwalior - 474011

E-mail: shivpal@inlibnet.ac.in

E-mail: ashokj@iimahd.ernet.in

E-mail: jngautam@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

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Need for resources sharing through consortia has become a necessary for the libraries all over the world. Various factors contribute to this situation. Indian libraries are no exception to this fast changing compute environment. This paper gives a brief account of some of the major consortia initiatives taken during the last couple of years. An effort has been made in this paper to list the issues involved in consortia and also offers few valuable suggestions.

KEYWORDS: Electronic resources, Consortia, Indian Libraries, Consortia Initiatives in India

0. INTRODUCTION

In the Vedic ages higher education in India was fashioned by the rishis and sages. The early Gurukul system of education flourished in the Vedic and Upanishad periods. The University system came into existence only in the 6th century B.C. at Takshashila. Two other universities, namely, Nalanda and Vikramsila were established in the 4th and 5th century A.D., respectively [1]. This shows that India had a very old tradition of education and research. Presently, we have 273 university level institutions, which comprise 52 'Deemed Universities', 40 Agricultural Universities, 162 traditional universities, 33 technical, 18 medical, 3 Information technology, 1 Journalism, 6 Law and 10 open universities. In addition, there are 12,600 colleges (Education, Website updated 2000) out of which 80% offer undergraduate course and 50% offer postgraduate courses [2], [3], [4]. All the above universities, deemed universities, and R& D institutions are functioning under various education and R&D systems like All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), University Grants Commission (UGC), Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) or Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) etc. These have library systems to support education, learning and research and meet information needs of their academic and research community. These are the hub for the information storage and dissemination.

1. RESEARCH SHARING THROUGH CONSORTIA

Libraries in the fast changing environment are facing difficult challenges, and the major challenges are cut in their budgets on one hand and pressures to perform better and serve a wide variety of clientele, on the other. Clientele is ever growing. They are expected to achieve efficiency and effectiveness while cuts are being imposed on the resources. They are expected to find out new and creative ways with the limited rather dwindling resources. Sharing of resources seems to be the panacea for these problems, however this spirit should not get suppressed by the feeling of being superior or inferior. This structure is well accepted as is evident from numerous resource sharing mechanisms operating in the west and a few in India.

Historically, academic libraries formed consortia for the primary purpose of sharing printed materials. Now these are forming consortia to provide common access to electronic resources across the Internet and forming them on a statewide basis [5]. Successful consortia should be based on geographic proximity; a period of maturation; involvement of front line library staff; and a clear understanding of the libraries' common objectives [6]. While considerable savings are possible using consortium for delivery of scholarly periodical articles but savings from joint collection development may not be very significant. Sharing resources and expertise is seen by consortia as one of the best ways to cope with rising costs and shrinking budgets.

The information and communication technology has touched every aspect of life due to its tremendous capacity to provide exceptional power and ability to people to perform various tasks and jobs, and its ease of use. The technology has over the years grown highly user friendly. Publishing industry is also one of the area where the technology has spread its wings. Today's information technology and new ways of publishing has promoted users as well as librarians to go for electronic publications for the new acquisition. Tremendous advantages provided by IT and the challenges, particularly the funds crunch, forced to resort to consortium initiatives.

If electronic documents subscribed through consortium or aggregator, it can provide libraries with a single point of access, reference control, and better management of finances for all its electronic periodical subscriptions. Service can utilise the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW) to deliver full text articles direct to users' workstations. Users can carry out searches on a single table contents of database and access, view, download, or print full text electronic periodical articles from any publisher, provided the library has a valid subscription. Service aims to simplify library subscription purchasing of all electronic periodical titles, eliminate the need for different passwords for each title, simplify management of access to these periodicals, supply standard, customized periodicals usage reports to librarians, provide searching facilities, assist librarians in electronic archiving, and enable electronic document delivery to users via the libraries. In effect, it offers more concrete advantages than, if gone alone. The advantages it offers are the scopes for negotiations for less price, favourable bargains, easy to handle complicated issues like licensing, archiving, etc. Additionally, the consortia offer an efficient and inexpensive way to purchase an automated library system. In the United States, private and public universities have been cooperating and sharing with each other. Many of these universities were, and are, competitors too. Their libraries became the common ground where they could work together for the greater good [7].

2. CONSORTIA INITIATIVE IN INDIA

Sensing the spirit and advantages of consortium mechanism, Number of Indian Few of the important consortium mechanisms are briefly mentioned below.

2.1 Organisations in India have also initiated the consortium activities

Ø FORSA Libraries CONSORTIA

Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy & Astrophysics (FORSA) was established in 1981. It chalked out plans and strategies for library co-operation, resource sharing and developed necessary tools, pertaining to print media. Members of FORSA are Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Inter-University Centre for Astronomy & Astrophysics (IUCAA), National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA), Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Raman Research Institute (RRI), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Nizamiah Observatory (NO) and Uttar Pradesh State Observatory (UPS0). This group was formed for the sharing of resources in areas common to research and development. FORSA is subscribing to common database full text journals on behalf of all member libraries

for their user [8].

2.2 CSIR CONSORTIA

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), established in 1942 is India's largest research and development organization. It has 40 laboratories spread over the length and breadth of the country. More than 22,000 persons work in various laboratories and institutions of CSIR. The Council is responsible for the research and development in science and technology. The major objective of CSIR consortia is to strengthen CSIR library resources by pooling, sharing and providing electronic access to scholars and scientists of CSIR labs and to promote the culture of electronic access.

NISCAIR (earlier known as INSDOC - Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre, New Delhi and NISCOM - National Institute of Science Communication, New Delhi) and other Laboratories of CSIR worked to form "Consortium for CSIR Laboratories for Accessing e-journals". Meetings of "enterprising" librarians were held at NCL (National Chemical Laboratory), Pune held in April 2000 and February 2001. CSIR librarians and librarians of Regional Research Laboratory, Trivandrum met and discussed their need and requirement of consortium or common electronic subscription. First proposal on consortium was submitted to DG-CSIR in May 2001. Extensive trial for Elsevier was provided. A study group was set up in May 2001, which submitted its report in October 2001. Based on Study group recommendation. Negotiations Committee was constituted to negotiate on behalf of all CSIR laboratories. Negotiations Committee held extensive meetings with Elsevier, Kluwer, Springer (through their agents), in January 2002 and

subsequently an agreement has been signed with, e-journal publisher, M/s Elsevier Science for a period of four years for 1200 journals in June 2002. Under this scheme, CSIR scientists will be able to access these journals and download material for their use [9], [10].

2.3 UGC / INFLIBNET Initiative

The University Grants Commission is an autonomous organization working under Ministry of Human Resources and Development (MHRD), Govt. of India. It is established by an act of Parliament in 1956 and working for coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of University education. In addition to its role of giving grants to universities and colleges, the University Grants Commission also advises Central and State Governments on the measures necessary for the improvement of university education. Libraries of Academic institutions come under UGC. Budget cuts, reduced staff, devaluation of Indian Rupee against major currencies, and escalation in cost of publications are major problems faced by these libraries. As a direct consequence of the problems, the number of journals subscribed by these libraries has gone down drastically. Realizing the need for common mechanism for access to scholarly information, UGC has set it as a priority for the academic and research community [11]. Therefore, an initiative of e-resources subscription was made to provide wider and larger access to electronic journals and databases.

INFLIBNET: Information and Library Network Centre is an autonomous Inter-University Centre (IUC) of University Grants Commission (UGC) involved in creating infrastructure for sharing information among academic and research and development institutions [12]. As a part of its activity, it is working as a nodal agency providing content over the long term, collection development, electronic access and consortia licensing for academic institution coming under UGC.

For initiating electronic access to academia, INFLIBNET / UGC have started consortium process. An expert committee has been setup by the INFLIBNET for selection of E-resources in different disciplines. It has been decided to begin with the areas of physical, chemical and biological sciences, and mathematics in the first instance. Other areas would be taken up subsequently. The aim of this initiative is to make accessible as many journals as possible to the entire Indian academic community through single point administration and subscriptions. INFLIBNET also has plan to make a parallel beginning with the social sciences/humanity in addition to the above. INFLIBNET is evaluating and examining the user base in the various Universities, the main journals used, the publishers and the subscriptions schemes. As mentioned in a presentation (Kumbar, T S, 2002), The major funding will be come from UGC for starting e-subscription with a pilot work in select disciplines in the beginning. Potential electronic resources for the subscription will be

identified through experts consultation involving universities. This project is expected be operational by February 28, 2003 [13].

2.4 MHRD Effort

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Govt. of India setup a consortium named as “Indian National Digital Library in Science and Technology (INDEST) Consortium”. This consortium was formed based on recommendation made by the group of experts appointed by the Ministry for “Consortia-based Subscription to Electronic Resources for Technical Education System in India [14].

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) would release the funds required for subscription to electronic resources for the 38 institutions viz. IISc, IITs, NITs, IIMs and a few others (as per recommendation of the MHRD expert group) directly to the consortium headquarter set-up at one of the beneficiary institutions. Consortium headquarter, would function under a National Coordination Committee for taking decisions on policy issues guided by the overall policy direction of the Government. The expenditure on electronic resources proposed for subscription under the consortium for selected institutions would be met from the funds made available by the MHRD. The consortia being an open-ended proposition, welcomes all other institutions to join it on their own for sharing maximum benefits it offers in terms of highly discounted subscription rates and better terms of agreement with the publishers. Moreover, beneficiary institutions may also subscribe to additional electronic resources through the consortium that are not being funded by the MHRD.

3. DIFFICULTIES / PROBLEMATIC ISSUES:

Indian Universities / Research Institutions are governed by different ministries and departments. Even though there are common areas among them, where similar data set or full text database is required by all the group, yet due to lack of mutual understanding still there could be a duplication / overlaps. National Site licensing kind of mechanism could be developed, if all group can come together under one umbrella.

3.1 Archiving

None of the above groups have mentioned about the archiving of electronic journals. We have past experience of publishing industry that in case of mergers, cessation and stoppages, we do not have backup for such journals. In such a situation, if we have print subscription, the libraries would at least have the printed copy of the journals in the collection. But in case of electronic journals, if a particular publisher or aggregator stops a publication or any other situation arises, the library will not have a copy. The group subscription does not respond to this situation. In countries like US and other, they have National Archival Centre, which could be thought about in the entire scheme of consortium mechanisms?

The Centre can have similar mission such as JSTOR [15] as follows:

Ø To build a reliable and comprehensive archive of important scholarly journal literature for the Indian libraries.

- Ø To improve access to the subscribed journals within the community
- Ø To help fill gaps in existing library collections of journal backfiles
- Ø To address preservation issues such as mutilated pages and long-term deterioration of paper copy
- Ø To reduce long-term capital and operating costs of libraries associated with the storage and care of journal collections
- Ø To assist scholarly associations and publishers in making the transition to electronic modes of publication
- Ø To study the impact of providing electronic access on the use of the scholarly materials.

3.2 Usage Statistics

Provision of usage statistics for the individual members is very helpful in the decision to continue subscription, and also to avoid future ambiguity.

3.3 Consultation with All

While subscribing to electronic journals, all individual libraries need to be consulted. All member libraries should be encouraged in the deliberations or decisions in the matter of subscription, funding etc. There is a need for regular dialogue among the member libraries. Transparency and trust would facilitate achieving the goals.

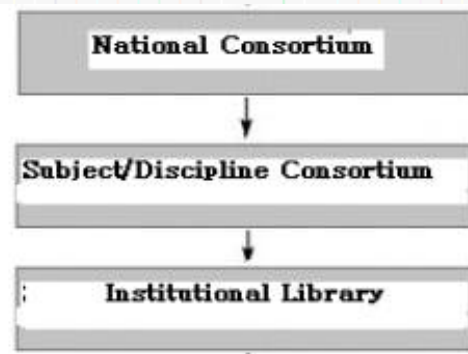
3.4 Structure

Consortia purchasing is a desirable practice. It will save money, manpower and effort, but any lacunae in the structure may create difficulties/problems to the users/members of the consortium system.

Proposed Structure:

System should have well defined objective such as “The purpose of this consortia shall be to enhance library and learning resources centers' cooperative activities and services that would benefit the users of the member institutions”.

- § National Consortium
- § National Coordination Committee
- § Subject/Discipline Consortium
- § Humanity and Social Science
- § Technology and Science



National Consortium

All Subject/Discipline consortium can be a part of this consortium so that the hybrid area where disciplines are clashing or overlapping can be treated as common to all the subject/discipline consortium or certain numbers. Territory could be all subject and areas related to the institutions of Indian academia for the purpose of acquiring and accessing commercial electronic information resources. Its aim is to simplify licensing arrangements, improve cost-benefits for member libraries, and to explore opportunities for making electronic product more widely to all, regardless where they are situated/allocated. National consortium will negotiate with the publisher or aggregator on behalf of subject/discipline consortium. This will also have the responsibility of centralized or distributed archiving for the all electronically subscribed resources, so that the archives will be available to all.

National Coordination Committee

This committee can be a decision-making committee for the national consortium. One person from all Subject/Discipline Consortium can be deputed to this committee. The committee should discuss all the policy matters related to national consortium. It should work for the benefit of all discipline consortia and also identify other areas where discipline consortia could be extended.

Humanity and Social Science

All the institution or organization no matter working under whatever organization, if they are dealing with humanity and social science as a subject for electronic subscription can be a part of this group.

Technology and Science

As mentioned for the humanity and social science all the institution or organization no matter working under whatever organization, if they are dealing with these disciplines for electronic subscription can be a part of this group.

3.5 Collection Development

Collection Development Guidelines need to be framed. Guidelines given below could be analyzed for the national consortia [16].

q Principal considerations for the inclusion in national consortium purchasing:

Ø Establishing a rationale for the acquisition of each resource

Ø Meeting faculty and student information needs

Ø **Providing access to electronic resources and integrating them into library programs**

q **Balance should be sought among:**

Ø **Disciplines**

Ø **Instructional and research resources**

Ø **Different needs of each campus**

q **Priority should be given to those electronic resources, which offer:**

Ø **Integrity of the resource**

Ø **Economies of scale**

Ø **Benefit to the greatest number of users**

Ø **Timely availability**

Ø **Increased functionality**

Ø **Remote Access**

Ø **Improved resource sharing**

Ø **Rights to perpetual access**

3.6 Responsibility of Consortia & its member

Democracy is the greatest asset and principle for equality. Same should be the norm for the consortium. All initiatives and efforts should be taken in the same spirit. The system should be very transparent and need to be flexible for the benefit of all the involved community. At the same time it should be strong enough that no one group or part of group utilize its benefits only for itself.

Consortia system should have strong bylaws, MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) for its members with clear guidelines and instructions, based on the democratic principle. MOU need to be signed by the Institution Head with all terms and conditions unambiguously stated. The institutions will be bound to follow all terms and conditions in letter and spirit.

4. OTHER THINGS

As we know that this model covers the disciplines/areas (Discipline consortia) as a base. So the discipline consortia should be able to specify the content and the format for resources to be acquired. Discipline consortia should take advice or majority decision from the member libraries.

Selection decisions should not be compromised by provider-defined linkages between print and electronic versions of the same products.

An electronic resource should have sufficient content to evaluate its usefulness and to justify its selection.

Acquisitions should be compatible with the goals of the national consortia purchasing strategic plan.

In any case, this purchasing should also take the right to archive the whole document at the national consortia site for the access and use

by the member library or any of the distributed location depending upon the discipline under which that will fall.

Consortia purchasing for different disciplines under national consortium should do equal justice to all the disciplines. Overlap should be avoided. How does the grouping of disciplines take place? We cannot do justice, if we take management and technology in one set of groups. This will provide benefit to the one group of library; others will have to manage with minimum resources. The structure should be scalable discipline wise. If we have national site licensing for the electronic resources, we cannot do it in this mode. The Fifth Law of Library Science states, "Library is a growing organism", therefore, the future also has to be kept in mind, and thus issue of archiving assumes great significance. We, therefore, need to address the issue of national archiving while negotiating, entering into license agreements or drafting MOUs.

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Mr. Shivpal Singh Kushwah is working with INFLIBNET Centre as a Scientific and Technical Officer-I, from last five year. He has B.Sc. and MLIS from Jiwaji University, Gwalior. Published many articles in professional journals and organised training prog. In regional language. His areas of interest are Electronic journal, Electronic publishing, Indian language database, union catalogue, Bibliographic standus and formats.



Mr. Ashok Jambhekar Librarian, Vikram Sarabhai Library, Indian Institute of Management, and Head, National Information Centre on Management (NICMAN), Ahmedabad. He has authored/co-authored/edited ten books and published and presented over 25 papers. In connection with the research study he has visited several countries.



Dr. J N Gautham is presently the Reader and Head, S O S, Library and Information Science, Jiwaji University Gwalior. He has M Sc, M Lib I Sc and Ph D, and successfully guided 12 students for awarding Ph. D in Library and Information Science. Has 15 years of teaching experience. Major area of interest includes user study, Bibliometrics, Information communication systems etc. Published over 40 papers and 5 books