

DEVELOPMENT OF CONSORTIAL APPROACH AND RESOURCE SHARING IN HIGHER EDUCATION LIBRARIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDIA

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Abstract

This paper mainly traces the historical development of consortia based library services. States that the consortial approach in the form of cooperation was initiated by Melvil Dewey in 1880s. Main factors behind such cooperation are outlined. States that like any other form of library services consortia were also first came into existence in the United States where by the year 1970 more than 125 academic library consortia were functional. Finds that now the trend has changed and consortia are coming up in developing countries also mainly for the acquisition of electronic resources. Briefly touches the history of consortial development in India where it had not been very successful mainly due to human reasons. Describes in details the two recently formed consortia in India i.e. INDEST and E-journal Consortium of UGC Infonet. Describes the pros and cons of the present model of subscription to full set of journals of publishers in the form of so called "Big Deals" and advises that these big deals may not be really big in many cases. Outlines some of the guidelines for the librarians in these conditions. Concludes that the consortia in the country should work in close cooperation and not in competition to each other.

Keywords : Consortia, E-Resources, Higher Education, INDEST

1. INTRODUCTION

Consortium is buzz word for the librarians of the higher education institutions of the country today and the credit goes to the successful functioning of the INDEST (Indian National Digital Library in Engineering Science and Technology) Consortium under the aegis of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) Government of India.

Through the exact date when first of the all the library consortium was introduced is not known but the concept of a Consortium in the form of partnership or association has long been a "tenet of librarianship" (1). There is sufficient published literature on the topic which indicates that the concept is not new and it refers to "Co-operation, coordination and collaboration between, and amongst, libraries for the purpose of sharing information resources (2). However, the usage of the word became popular in 1980s onward mainly due to the following factors.

- increase in the output in publication or the information explosion made is practically impossible for any library to fulfill the requirement of its clientele alone.
- Budget cut became a universal trend and the unjustified increase in the cost of publication specially scientific periodicals made the situation worse.
- Development of information technology made the transfer of information digitally possible and thus removed the physical barrier of actual transfer the document.
- More and more information products became available digitally specially through Internet.
- Increasing demand for service from customers together with the need to improve – inter-library lending services and library collection forced the libraries to form such consortia

2. ORIGIN OF LIBRARY CONSORTIA

According to Kopp (2) none other than Melvil Dewey wrote about library cooperation in an issue of the Library Journal in 1886 and in 1887 E.A. Mac presented his views on "Cooperation vs Competition" in the same journal in 1888. American Library Association (ALA) also formed a "Cooperation Committee" whose report was published in ALA Bulletin in 1880s. During a symposium organized by ALA on the topic "The Library of Tomorrow" in 1939, R.D. Downs presented a futuristic view of library cooperation in his paper "One for all; a historical sketch of library cooperation 1930-1970. During 1970 the US Office of Education commissioned the System Development Corporation (SDC) to carry out a nationwide study of academic library consortia to "develop a fund of descriptive and prospective information about the activities of academic library consortia and provide guidance of libraries that were forming or planning to form consortia. On the basis of this study two major publications "Directory of Academic Library Consortia" (3) and "Guidelines for Library Cooperation : Development of Academic Library Consortia (4) were brought out. By the time the study was complete. 125 academic library consortia were already in existence in the United States.

2. WHY CONSORTIA

According to SDC report the main reason for the formation of the consortia was perhaps the thinking that consortial approach offers an attractive solution to many outstanding problems of the participating libraries. With the progress in library automation, use of computers in bibliographic processing and database searching gained boost to resource sharing and consortia formation.

Potter (5) has identified two main reasons for the libraries for formation of consortium. The sharing of existing physical resources is the main reason and the purpose of identifying and addressing the common needs arising from developments in information technology as other. The growing importance of Internet and World Wide Web and possibility of offering a variety of electronic resources across the Internet is also a major factor in the formation of consortia. Specially the newer consortia have came up due to the increasing awareness that the electronic resources are going to play more and more important role in scientific communication process. Some of the other reasons for the formation of consortia may be summarized as below –

- An interest in cooperative projects that might benefit all students and faculty of participating libraries.
- Providing enhanced library services with an emphasis on access to new electronic resources, bibliographic databases and services offered through Internet and Word Wide Web.
- Controlling building costs by providing regional storage facilities.
- Expediting inter library borrowing which has evolved into providing as many electronic resources as possible at the lowest cost to consortia members
- To ensure that faculty and students across all consortia members have equal access to electronic resources.
- Better sharing of existing resources.

3 CURRENT SCENARIO

During last couple of decades the formation of library consortia has shown steady growth mainly due to the developments in electronic communications. Consortia are no more restricted to the developed countries, they are coming into in Africa and Asia as well. Brief description of some of the leading Consortia of the world is given below :

The number of academic and non-academic library consortia are in hundred in the United States and it is not possible to describe them here. Some of the leading names are Ohio-LINK (a consortium of 84 Ohio Universities, Colleges, Community Colleges and State Library of Ohio); TexShare (a consortium of 700 Texas academic, public and medical libraries); SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resource Coalition) in Canada; ARL (Association of Research Libraries); VIVA (Virtual Library of Virginia, a Consortium of academic libraries in Virginia); IDAL (The Illinois Digital Academic Library). The list is very very long and can not be presented here. However an excellent review of library consortia in the United States has been presented by Bostick.(6).

Besides the United States a number of efforts in the formation of library consortia are being made throughout the world. In Brazil, Electronic library for Scientific Journals has come up for the universities and research institute in Sao Paulo through resource sharing and cooperation. The project will facilitate information access and minimise acquisition costs of international scientific periodicals consequently increasing user satisfaction.(7).

HEAL – Link (8) is a consortium of all academic and most research libraries in Greece. This consortium was established in 1998 as part of the project funded by the Greek Ministry of Education and EU structural funds. Its aim was to revive the slow fading away of Greek academic libraries due to lack of adequate budget.

CALIS (China Academic Libraries Information System) is the biggest consortium in Asia. It came into existence in 1998. It is primarily funded by Chinese Government and is a nation wide academic consortium in China. CALIS plays a major role in resource sharing among the Chinese Academic Libraries. It has developed a three tiered coordination and management network comprising four national information centers as tier one. These centers are devoted to four general disciplines and are located in prominent universities. The second tier is composed of seven regional information centers. The third tier consists of around 300 member libraries (9-10).

Major breakthrough and recognition in consortia approach came in the form of establishment of a Consortium of Consortia in mid 1990s. The name was later on changed to International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) (11). The meetings of ICOLC are held twice a year. These meetings, and work of ICOLC members, have opened new opportunities for consortia and vendors to discuss different ways of acquiring material and to listen to each others' concerns. Besides the ICOLC, a new type of consortium is emerging, the "super consortium" which is composed of a number of individual consortia and focused on a specific purpose such as Network Alliance which is comprised of a number of regional networks.

4. INDIAN SCENE

Many efforts have taken place in the country specially in the area of formation of library networks mainly due to the drastic changes in the functioning of the libraries and also the fact that resource crunch in these libraries forced them to resort to some sort of cooperation. As a result formal library networks came into existence, such as CALIBNET in 1986, DELNET in 1988, MALIBNET etc. Establishment of INFLIBNET in 1988 by UGC (University Grants Commission, India) in 1988 gave a real boost to library automation activities in the country. Many libraries in India came together voluntarily for resource sharing and the most prominent among them was the consortium of "Astronomy libraries in India". The participating libraries were Indian Institute of Astrophysics Library, Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics Library, National Centre for Radio Astrophysics Library, Nizamia Observatory Library, Physical Research Laboratory Library, Raman Research Institute Library, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research Library and Uttar Pradesh State Observatory Library.

Even after more than two decades of cooperative efforts for resource sharing among the Libraries in India, there is not even a single successful programme that could be used as a bench mark to replicate in other libraries. The main factors that affected these kind of efforts were more human and attitudinal than technological or economical (12). However, things are changing and the information environment is more conducive today. The advent of Internet and WWW have provided the tools to tackle the problems faced earlier mainly the physical movement of information resource which no longer is required. As a result successful consortium like INDEST and UGC Infonet E-consortia have come up.

4.1 INDEST

INDEST is one of the successful example of consortia formation in India. It was conceived as a strategic cooperation (13) called the "Indian National Digital Library in Engineering Science and Technology" (INDEST) based on the five project proposals submitted to three major ministries of the Government of India, namely the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the Ministry of Information Technology (MIT) and the Department of Biotechnology (DOB). INDEST is a fully functional consortium since 2003 and the funds for its operation are being provided by the MHRD. INDEST is a three level structure. The level 1 comprises of the seven Indian Institute of Technology and Indian Institute of Science Bangalore. The level 2 comprised of the National Institutes of Technology and other Institute centrally funded by the MHRD. In level 3 are the individual libraries. At present one member at level 3, for most information INDEST website <http://indest.iitd.ac.in> (14) may be visited. Some of the fulltext as well bibliographic databases available to member libraries under INDEST is given below. (Access rights may differ depending on the level of the member library.)

4.1.1 Fulltext Databases

1. Elsevier's ScienceDirect
2. ACM Digital Library
3. IEL Online
4. Springer Verlag journals
5. Emerald complete
6. ABI/Inform
7. Ebscohost
8. ASCE journals
9. ASME Journals
10. Nature online etc.

4.1.2. Bibliographic Databases

1. Chemical Abstract Service
2. MathScinet
3. Inspec
4. Compendex etc.

4.2 UGC INFONET E-JOURNAL CONSORTIUM

This consortium has been the joint effort of University Grant Commission of India and the Ministry of Information Technology. The executing agency of this consortium is the INFLIBNET Centre. In the first phase 50 universities have been selected where proper information and communication facilities shall be developed. These libraries will have access to the e-recourses being made available under this programme. At present the following resources are available to UGC users (15).

4.2.1. Bibliographic Databases

1. Chemical Abstracts Service
2. Biological Abstracts
3. Royal Society of Chemistry
 - 3.1 Analytical Abstracts
 - 3.2 Catalysts & Catalysed Reactions
 - 3.3 Chemical Hazards in Industry
 - 3.4 Laboratory Hazards Bulletin
 - 3.5 Methods in Organic Synthesis
 - 3.6 Natural Product Update

4.2.2. Full Text Databases

- 1 American Chemical Society
- 2 Royal Society of Chemistry
- 3 American Physical
- 4 Institute of Physics
- 5 American Institute of Physics
- 6 Cambridge University Press
- 7 Project Muse
- 8 J-STOR
- 9 Kluwer Journals
- 10 Springer Journals
- 11 Emerald
- 12 Nature
- 13 Science Online
- 14 Encyclopaedia Britannica (National Site Licensing)
- 15 Elsevier Science

4.2.3. Portals

1. Ingenta - Gateway Portal
2. J-Gate Gateway Portal

Both the consortia in the country are came into existence to provide the e-resource access to their member libraries. They are contracting with publishers for such rights. Main mode of access is through purchasing rights to the full sets of the information resources of the publishers. It is also called "big deals" in academic circle. The list of databases given above makes this clear. In this model the publisher allows the libraries to access their resources at so called highly subsidized rates which are often misleading. However, the user libraries have access to the resources which they have been looking for since long.

4.3 Pitfalls in Consortium Mode of Acquisition

With the acquisition of electronic resources through the consortium mode seems to be very attractive but there is also a dark side of the picture. Though at present it appears or being made to appear that the consortia members are immensely benefited by cooperative acquisition, it may not be quite true specially at the cost of these acquisition and its use by the member institutions. An excellent analysis the pros and cons has been discussed by Ball (16) in his through provoking paper "What's the big deal and why it is a bad deal for universities". Some of the points he has emphasized are –

1. Archival rights and licensing

Many of the licenses so obtained do not necessary offer archival access. In such cases our uses do not have continuing access to the material beyond the term of license. Further content may change. Titles imprint and companies may be brought or sold. There are a couple of titles in Springer list which we had access in 2003 but we do not have in 2004, as the licensing of the titles of those journals terminated in 2004. Most dangerous is the restricting a class of user within an institute. For example SciFinderScholar (Chemical Abstracts) restricts the use even for consultancy projects in an institute. The publisher and not the library decides whom to allow access. "Our freedom to decide who may have access to our resources have been forfeited" which was not in the case of print.

2. Usage Considerations

In the so called big deal all of the publications of a publisher or aggregator are available for a definite period. But the big question is are all these titles are of use. Though the detailed usage study of the INDEST resources has not been commenced so far whatever data we have is not very encouraging. A study by Hamaker (17) at University of North Carolina reveals something else. According to this study 28 percent of ScienceDirect titles accounted for 75 of the downloads. Another study by Singh and Murthy(18) is even more revealing and finds that 12% of the ScienceDirect titles are responsible for 75% of the downloads. Nicholas and Huntington's (19) study of Emerald titles is still more startling. In case of Emerald 43 percent of the subscribers viewed only one and 40 percent of the subscribers viewed very 2 to 5 titles out of 118 licensed. Thus 83 percent of the subscribers viewed only less than 5 percent of the titles. Then why to pay for 95 percent? The core collection it means is still alive and well.

3. Citation Ranking

Big deal will also affect the citation ranking of bigger publishers. As more and more journals of bigger publishers will be available to the researchers, they will tend to cite from the big publishers thus citation ranking of these journals will increase, and, as the print only journals from third world countries will be less and less used, there citation ranking will decrease which ultimately will lead to their death.

4. Decision Making

It also poses a challenge for libraries, as we no longer are involved in making decisions about our collection development as we have acquire the total package. Now the decision will focus on content level and not title level.

5. Monopoly

It also has given rise to the monopoly . It is forcing us to take or leave the complete package which is not a welcome step.

6. WHAT LIBRARIANS SHOULD DO

In spite of the above mentioned pitfalls, it does not mean that we should not form consortia. We should definitely do it. We should make them so strong that the consortia and not the publisher is able to dictate terms and make decisions.. We are their customers and we are definitely bigger than them. Some of steps which may be taken to make consortia stronger may be summarized as follows.

1. The Consortia should take detailed study of the usage and terms and conditions before finalizing the acquisition policy.
2. Standard procurement policy should be followed by identifying the need, preparing the specifications, finding the right supplier, awarding the contract and finally by measuring and monitoring the contractor's performance.
3. We can focus on developing alternative means of scholarly communication such as Open Archive Initiative. Current decision, rather forced one, of most of the commercial publishers to allow the authors to retain the copy right of their articles will give a major boost of this initiative. The Government should develop a solid policy for this purpose.
4. In case of subscription we may develop alternative strategy such as paying subscription to only highly based journals and buy only articles from less used journals.
5. Help Indian journals go online to increase their visibility through out the world.

7. CONCLUSION

In consortial mode of library service every stake holder has to play a very important role, be it member libraries, consortia administration, information resource supplier or the user. A coordinated effort by all these members is absolute essential for the successful running of a consortium. In country like ours we have to ensure that the maximum output can be obtained by minimum input as this country has other priorities too. Spending unthoughtfully on luxury of information will not lead us anywhere. On the other hand it may lead to overdose and may develop some type of allergy in the readers. Regular use and information requirement studies should be conducted by the two big spenders i.e. INDEST and UGC Infonet E-journal consortia. Further these consortia should not only remain the information purchaser but also should work as information generator. Developing a digital library of all the thesis and dissertations available in the country may be a right step in this direction. Lastly all existing and future consortia should work as complementary to each other and not as competitors.

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Besides the professional activities Mr. Singh is also actively engaged in social welfare. He is the founder patron of a Social Organisation 'Lakshya' which takes care of the leprosy home in Roorkee. Lakshya has now a target of establishing a Old age home and School for the poor section of the Society where best possible education can be provided to the meritorious but needy children.