

Consortia for Academic Libraries in India – INFLIBNET Approach

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Introduction:

The university libraries are committed to supporting excellence in the university teaching, research and outreach through ensuring access for its users to knowledge and information. However the ability of the libraries to meet their commitments is challenged by the rising prices, continuing growth of scholarly literature, ever increasing cost of the journals subscription and also shrinking library budget. These challenges force the libraries to work together to provide greater economy and access to literature. The situation calls for library cooperation, in other words, cooperative purchase of library materials through consortia approach.

Perhaps the most important development for academic libraries during the current decade has been the move from organizational self - sufficiency to collaborative survival mode as personified by the growth of library consortia.

What is consortia?

Basically, consortium means group of libraries coming together with common interest. One of the libraries or agencies works as coordinator for identification of libraries for each publisher, negotiation, legal matters etc. The aim of consortia is to achieve what the members of the group cannot achieve individually.

Situation in India

- Indian Universities are finding it hard to maintain the subscriptions to even for core journals due to ever increasing cost of the journals subscription and also shrinking budget.
- The average number of subscriptions to international journals by Indian University is even less than 500 titles, when compared to more than 10000 in the western countries.
- Though the libraries cannot increase the subscription to journals due to budget restriction, it is possible to provide access to more titles by participating in a consortia agreement with other libraries whereby each library can get access to other libraries by getting mutually benefited.
- Though the collection of the libraries do overlap to some extent, it is unlikely that the collection is same in entirety.
- This approach will bridge the availability gap.
- Secondly, group of libraries can purchase the scholarly journals on a heavy discounted consortia price offered by many publishers, vendors.
- This will result in easy access to resources helps further improving the quality of Indian research output.
- Due to consortia approach, academic and research users can now hope to have access to their learned journal articles in electronic form with the consortium arrangement.

Such a consortium arrangement will give the library and also the users an extended access and provide better service at reduced cost.

Consortia – Objectives

The main objectives of consortia are listed below:

- Increase the cost benefit per subscription
- Promote rational use of funds
- Ensure continuous subscription to periodicals
- Guarantee local storage of the information acquired for continuous use by present and future users
- Develop technical capabilities among the staff in operating electronic resources
- Have strategic alliance with the institutions of common interest resulting in reduced information cost and improved resource sharing

Role of INFLIBNET

INFLIBNET, established by UGC, is already supporting resource sharing among the libraries to facilitate access to scholarly publications. The first step is through implementation of automation in the university libraries. In the initial period, INFLIBNET has given priority to infrastructure development at the university libraries to support automation and networking activities by providing funds through UGC. With this, INFLIBNET has been able to create an IT conscious environment in the university libraries. Librarians have now accepted the challenge and are working to bring these changes in their libraries.

In an effort to increase the usage of library collection, six document delivery centres have been established at different universities. The union catalogue of current periodicals subscribed by these six libraries are kept on the INFLIBNET's website and a copy is made available to all the libraries. The participating libraries need to take full advantage of this service for the benefit of their academic and research community by increasing the awareness among the users. Efforts are also being made to provide the contents of the journals being subscribed by these libraries on the INFLIBNET's website. It is now possible to think of providing the full text access and document delivery services to the research and academic community by the libraries through INFLIBNET.

UGC Network which is expected to take off soon will play a major role in providing access, as each university will have suitable connectivity through VSAT technology and access to Internet and other sources of information.

Due to rapid growth of information technology, libraries must find ways to employ information technology as effectively as possible because it is dynamic, assimilated into library operations, and expensive to maintain. Forming a consortium of libraries is a way of life to maximise resource base and to meet the genuine needs of users from the participating library.

INFLIBNET & Participating libraries must work together to achieve set goals. The efforts made by centre like INFLIBNET will be successful only when the participating libraries take the initiative and provide necessary support and publicity to such efforts and take the maximum benefit. INFLIBNET should make attempt and identify few areas in the beginning viz. society publications, non-profit organizations etc to provide access to all the important journals for the entire University community.

(In this paper author has made an attempt to only introduce the concept of consortia in academic libraries and does not cover comprehensively the issues involved in consortia).