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ABSTRACT

Presents a view to stimulate discussion within the Indian library and academic community about adopting a model of library consortia to improve Library and Information Service. Using published literature identifies and discuses factors to be considered for choosing the model. Observes that the very concept of University Library Consortia in India is very fertile one. If hatched i.e. planned and implemented in a proper way can certainly yield fruits. But the success of consortia like other cooperative efforts depends on the proper mix of enthusiasm, innovative thinking, caution and skepticism. As University libraries in India have no or little experience on consortia, these have to go in a humble way. In this connection informal consortia can achieve considerable success provided participating universities effectively act as teams not as individuals to achieve common goals and should not forget "one will not get a chicken by smashing an egg open'.

KEY WORDS: Library Consortia, Literature Review, University Library Consortia, India, Strategies, Model, Funding and Costing, License Agreements, Archiving, Electronic Information Resources Development Policy.

0.   INTRODUCTION

Yes, the analogy is very simple. The vision is 'Chicken' and to make it a reality the 'Egg' has to be a fertile one and not a sterile one. Fertile egg needs hatching for certain time duration in a conducive environment, to get a chick. This chick should be given nutritious food, protected from the possible diseases and allowed to grow as a healthy hen/cock. At an appropriate time it has to be dressed to get chicken – the meat of hen/cock. The vision is to have an effective university library consortia in India and to make it a reality the right kind of consortia needs to be chosen and strategical planning has to be made for effective implementation. An effort is made in this paper to discuss about how to go ahead, in converting the vision into reality.

1.   VISION

Cooperative tactics have always been the fundamental principles guiding the society through the ages since civilization. Libraries are no exception. Libraries are increasingly accepting library consortia as a strategic means of taking the lead in shaping the emerging market for electronic sources of information and of circumscribing the power of the emerging international conglomerates of information providers [1]. Perhaps "the most important development for academic libraries during the current decade has been the move from organizational self sufficiency to a collaborative survival mode as epitomized by the growth of library consortia [2]".

Consortia enable libraries to meet the spiraling costs of printed journals and of online resources. It has been embraced worldwide by all categories of libraries. After all the basic philosophy of librarianship is the concept of sharing. Library consortia has given strength to the very fact that 'few libraries can exercise individually but all libraries can exercise collectively' [3]. The commonality of their activities and the relaxation of geographical boundaries fostered by information technologies have encouraged libraries (worldwide) to join consortia in order to remain relevant in the current library services context [4]. Sharing of electronic resources is the theme of greatest interest today in university libraries. Against this backdrop, the vision for university libraries in India is to remain relevant i.e. to have effective library consortia.

3.   PRESENT SCENARIO

Though the current trend is one of sharing integrated library systems and computer databases, collection development, purchasing of e-journals and staff development [5], library consortia ranges from highly decentralized to highly centralized, from informal to formal, from loosely affiliated buying clubs to tightly integrated virtual or actual organizations [6]. SALUS [7], CUNY [8], ILLINET [9], RBT [10], OhioLINK [11], HeBIS [12], NESLI [13], CURL [14], GAELIC [15], COUPERIN [16] to cite a few are in operation at different parts of the world. In the Indian context, if published literature is any indication IIM [17] and ISRO [18] have achieved some success in consortial approach. Perhaps this situation made Pandian, Jambhekar and Karisiddappa [19] to remark "Though there have been cooperative efforts for resource sharing among the libraries in India in the last two decades, it is hard to find one successful program that could be used as a benchmark to replicate in other libraries".

At present the University libraries in India are at cross roads, as these are still institutions with a strong traditional character [20]. A study of NUCSSI [21] confirms that our national acquisition of serials is not comprehensive, as about 15000 current titles are available in at least one library in India against 147000 titles throughout the world [22]. This number is even less than 8000 if University libraries only are counted. The current practices of building serials collections are grounded in the legacy of a print bound world in which each library is an island of access for its own users. The scientific journals being subscribed by the Indian Universities have undermined the ability of the universities at the level necessary to fulfill the financial provisions and not certainly the core ones. The problem of economic pressures – changing funding context of higher education since 1990s, rising costs, decreased purchasing power, dwindling budgets are still haunting them with technology recently becoming an element of importance in the development of university libraries. Access to telecommunications facility and Internet is on its rise in the Universities with nearly sixty percent having access to both [23]. But the same cannot be said of campus networks within each university.

4.   EXPERIENCE WORLDWIDE

Libraries of the future 'will be less a place where information is physically housed than a portal through which users will access information resources' [24] and consortia show the characteristics of initiatives, which are transitory in nature and demonstrate their long term potential in carving libraries of the future. Library consortia have a vital role to play in the current electronic environment with particular emphasis on 2000s during which Internet [25] has become widely available. But like any tool it must be understood for proper application. Otherwise it will lead to limited benefits if not outright satisfaction [26].

Based on a study of eighteen consortia in Europe [27] a diverse picture emerges with notable differences between countries. Certainly differences among consortia also exist in the USA and other first world countries [28]. The reviews of Alemna and Antwi [29], Bostic [30] and Dorner [31] show that consortia in their respective countries are the results of a lengthy discussion and efforts put in for more than ten to fifteen years. In fact Washington Research Library Consortium [32] is the result of efforts put in since 1960s. Lack of a determined national policy is stated to be the reason for slow movement of consortial approach in France [33], Italy [34], Belgium [35] and Turkey [36], where as it is the national consensus that led to success in Spain [37].

The bad experiences of ILLINET [38] which, after successfully supporting the libraries for fifteen years became dysfunctional and non-operative due to financial and technological developments should be kept in mind as Pandian, Jambhekar and Karisiddappa feels that 'the main factors that affected these kinds of efforts in India are more human and attitudinal in nature than technological or economic' [39]. Under the circumstances it becomes imperative on part of the university libraries in India to "Plan well ahead, to remain flexible in implementing those plans, to avoid procedure becoming more important than improvisation during planning, to be willing to take well-judged risks on occasions and to be fully aware of changing circumstances in the project's funding and political environment' [40].

The experiment of OhioLINK [41] of purchasing all titles from a growing group of major publishers in e-journal format showed that expanding access provides greater benefit to users than careful title by title selection leaving behind us peculiar questions "is bigger better?" and "whether to go for core collection or peripheral ones also?, How are the local needs balanced against collective needs of a consortium [42-43]." Peters [44] observes that consortial deals for electronic content collection development will make core collections more homogeneous. Improved ease of access has also demonstrated the high elasticity in information usage [45]. Hence libraries and consortia must seek to enable this desirable outcome by adopting models that provide for expanded access.

A group of organizations concerned with US libraries formed the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resource Coalition [46] As (SPARC) an alternative approach. A collaborative venture by Association of Research Libraries (ARL) and American Chemical Society (ACS) aimed at distributing research results faster and at significantly less cost to subscribers, ACS launches at least one new scientific journal each year for the next three years [47]. By focusing on scholarly information as a commodity to be sold, The Academic Press [48] has come out with a program consisting of two elements APPEAL and IDEAL. APPEAL (Academic Press Print and Electronic Access License) works on a basic premise that involves aggregating spending to provide collective access to material. Allows access to all periodicals electronically by each of the institutions and IDEAL the electronic library of all 175 journals that Academic Press currently publishes. Utah Academic Library Consortium [49] has developed a new service to provide journal articles to the requester through agreements with EBSCO a commercial library service provider at a price.

5.   HOW TO CONVERT REALITY IN TO VISION?

The world of library consortia is expanding rapidly around the world and along different lines with the motive being the same – cooperation. Hence enthusiasm is high in India because they have been so successful in other parts of the world. The consortium should intend to utilize fully, develop and improve access to the information resources for the purpose of promoting education, research and life- long learning thereby making a valid contribution to the advancement of knowledge and address the problems peculiar to India. The time now is for a national policy or consensus on library consortium taking into account the socio-economic, educational, technological aspects. By virtue of its position and objectives for which it was established, INFLIBNET can take initiation in this regard. A Forum on University Library Consortia in India (FULCI) can be formed for the exchange of information on negotiations and agreements and preparing common strategies for consortial purchase etc. FULCI may comprise of Vice-Chancellors, Finance Officers, Registrars and University Librarians of various participating Universities besides academicians. FULCI is charged to:

- Listen to the marketplace:
- Take account of country's different languages and cultures:
- Survey and analyze the information needs of participating libraries
- Identification and study of core and related subjects
- Study of nature and type of organization and its environment;
- Study of specific environment of user; study on users and about users; formal interview; analysis and identification of information needs:
- Review and compare costs of various products and services;
- Develop benchmark testing;
- Drafting the Guidelines to be adopted and review of these from time to time

5.1   The Model to be adopted:

Concerned about the quality of content and the ability to guarantee its future availability, the guidelines of prescribed by International Coalition Issues Statement on Electronic Journals [50] may be adopted. While different models are well known their value has still to be established especially from users' point of view [51]. The truth is that not only is there no one model for consortia but a single consortium may might employ several models; one for governance structures, another for e-resource selection and yet another for fiscal management [52]. The choice of a model [53] – formal or informal depends on the programs to be adopted, the range of activities to be performed. Provision of joint services – electronic database systems, union catalogs, shared library systems, shared ILL, digital facilities and physical cooperative storage facilities require formal consortia. On the other hand a limited range of activities – reciprocal borrowing, ILL agreements, negotiating database licenses etc require informal consortia.

If one opts for formal consortia, infrastructure and assets have to be owned by the concerned consortia and that each consortia has to pass through a stage to reach the formal one. At best INFLIBNET may own the assets and infrastructure. Few more advantages of informal consortia are that, these are voluntary and responsibilities are to be borne by the participating Universities only, no extra staff is required, no legal complexities are needed. The present situation in Indian universities demands that one should opt for 'Informal Consortia', as the situation is not still ripe for formal consortia to provide advanced joint services.

5.2 Funding and Costing:

Informal consortia either require no substantial funding arrangement or a minimal contribution to maintain operating costs. Several pricing models [54-56] exist for providing access to electronic journals. Models may be based on the composition of a package of resources, size of purchasing institution and other factors. A number of parameters used in the calculation of prices are clearly unfavorable at present for some consortia. A view to support this is that "it is artificial and economically irrational to use consortia to provide lower prices for e-journals. Publishers know that libraries will consider any discount from artificially inflated prices to be a bargain and persuade each other to take the illusory advantage. In fact the discounted prices for large consortia are meaningless; probably not a single buyer has actually paid the undiscounted price [57]".

If the trends [58-60] are any indication, then the following generic model may be adopted to begin with.

- A flat base fee equal and affordable for all member universities
- A choice of pricing taking into account, relative system usage, user counts, collection size in the order of merit has to be preferred
- Pricing of specialized databases should be based on user counts
- Provision for options – Unlimited and pay per use
- Unit cost needs to be lesser than print version
- Participating libraries should not be forced to go for both the versions
- Cost of access services and cost of content should be separate
- Very homogeneous consortia with libraries of same type and size may might use a single factor but more diverse consortium should consider using a mix of factors.

5.3   License Agreements and Archiving:

Although types of licenses [61] have improved considerably since the early years, a number of parameters used are clearly unfavorable and too complex at present for some consortia. One of the challenges that the libraries have to face is the trend towards turning information into a commodity for use through generalized expansion of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). Libraries have basically formed consortia in order to gain stronger negotiating positions and obtain better conditions. When all types of libraries in a state join together it can pay off in better license agreements and library consortia can buy access to resources that small libraries could never afford. On the down side by relinquishing negotiation to a consortium a library can sometimes relinquish its power to choose the system or database and could end up with the lowest cost product rather than the best one [62]. Experiences of Canadian National Site Licensing Project [63], Schneider [64], California State University [65] and the Guidelines of ICOLC [66] may be considered for license agreements.

- Statement of Current Perspective and Preferred Practices for the Selection and Purchase of Electronic Information could in Toto be adopted
- Permanent rights to use information purchased even in case of cancellation
- Authorization and authentication are the shared responsibilities of library and vendor
- Fair use provisions for educational, and research programs for viewing, downloading and printing
- Holds the right for reformatting within the fair use
- Adequate delivery of usage information of electronic product licensed
- Easy access to archival electronic material
- Hold the right to maintain archival access
- Ask for "most favored Customer Status"

5.4   Electronic Information Resources Development Policy:

- On the basis of five levels of information resources development i. e. Comprehensive, Research, Study, Basic and Minimum, three levels of resources development existing, current and desired level needs to be identified and indicated [67].
- Adopt Electronic Information Resources Development Policy taking in to consideration the results of mapping of information needs as a group agenda
- Balance has to be achieved among disciplines as concentrating on the spheres of science and technology; there is every chance that the other spheres of university system could be neglected

6.   CONCLUSION:

The very concept of University Library Consortia in India is very fertile one. If hatched i.e. planned and implemented in a proper way can certainly yield fruits. But the success of consortia like other cooperative efforts depends on the proper mix of enthusiasm, innovative thinking, and caution and skepticism [68]. There is no doubt that consortia will be able to deliver the goods far more effectively and efficiently than individual libraries. However, it remains essentially a cooperative tactical response of the group. The existence of various library consortia in different parts of the world has illustrated one principle i.e. a successful consortia has to have clear goals, a coherent membership and a structure that matches its goals and membership. As University libraries in India have no or little experience on consortia, these have to go in a humble way. In this connection informal consortia can achieve considerable success provided participating universities effectively act as teams not as individuals to achieve common goals and should not forget "one will not get a chicken by smashing an egg open'.

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