

Implications of E-Consortia: How the Educational Institutions of India are benefited?

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Abstract

E-consortia development is rooted in the history of academic institutions cooperative efforts and is now also driven by the need to provide remote users with licensed access to electronic resources that too very economically by sharing subscription cost. Consortia are formed with an objective to enhance the purchasing power of the participating institutions in the present scenario of major financial crunch and escalating cost of the resources in electronic form. By utilizing the support of the regional & national level networking, academic institutions in India can work cooperatively towards establishing E-consortia for offering and sharing electronic resources. Establishment of better consortium for integrating intellectual access will be a remarkable step in moving towards the electronic libraries.

Introduction

Electronic resources represent a significant and growing part of the academic institutions' offerings. Institutions today are facing unprecedented challenges not only to provide customer-responsive services, but to do so in the face of constant change. Modern era are facing such circumstances where it is not just enough what you own in your library, but equally important is, what your library is able to provide access to. The paradigm is shifting from ownership of countable print resources to providing access for electronic resources available in bulk. Electronic resources are clearly changing the whole scenario of how the publishers, authors, academicians, librarians and readers are managing the information. But this has many implications in terms of cost, promotional activities, their management issues etc. The perpetual job of academic institutions are collection development, preservation, retrieval of information for providing users service. These everyday jobs have become more complex with the introduction of electronic resources. In a developing country like India, different steps are being taken to disseminate information embedded in electronic resources as these are emerged as quick sources of information.

Consortia approach has emerged as the hallmark of libraries in order to harness electronic resources effectively. According to **Allen Kent** "*the success and survival of libraries will much depend on how much and to what extent the libraries cooperate with each other in future*". consortia development is rooted in the history of institutions cooperative efforts. A E-Consortium could be described as a group of organizations who come together to fulfill a combined objective that usefully requires co-operation and the sharing of resources. Thus in present form of e-consortia, a group of academic institutions/libraries are coming together for buying e-information. Voluminous development has urged the libraries to adopt new philosophies and techniques for collection development and reduce the cost of information; the reduction of cost is achieved by the e-consortium acting as an agent on behalf of all member libraries to negotiate a purchase price of electronic resources that is lower than that available to an individual institution. One of the libraries or agencies work as coordinator, for identification of libraries for each publisher, negotiation, legal matters etc. The e-consortia can be an ideal solution in present context, if that has been established and managed at the wider interests of the society and the mankind in total.

With the popularity of E-consortium mode of subscription, publishers have started working out best pricing models suitable for different types of E-consortia, whether at regional, local or national level. Most publishers already have well-defined policies and offers for the libraries subscribing as consortia. Evaluation of consortium for collective subscription of electronic resources has brought revolution in the ways the information is provided to the users in the academic libraries. It is very practical solution for subscribing to electronic resources keeping in view the ever escalating cost of electronic resources. Library consortia are driven by the need to provide remote users with licensed access to electronic resources that too very economically by sharing subscription cost based on number of member libraries. The larger is the membership base, the less is the subscription cost.

Need For E-Consortia

Technological developments, electronic publishing of scholarly journals, pricing models of publishers for consortia gives new opportunities to provide instant access to information. Following factors justifies the need of E-consortia development for the management of electronic resources:

Overloaded Budgets: Institutions committing larger portions of their budgetary allocations for either procuring or assessing electronic resources while the allocation keeps on diminishing. E-Consortia are formed with an objective to enhance the purchasing power of the participating institutes in this critical situation of major financial crunch faced by the information centres.

Quick Access: The technology provides an unparalleled media for delivery of information with greater speed and economy. Academic and Research users can now hope to have access to their learned journals articles in electronic form as the electronic access is comparatively cheaper. Users are beginning to expect electronic delivery that is speedy and accessible at remote.

Information explosion: There has been the sudden onslaught of new materials and electronic versions of old materials resulting in the availability of information in numerous forms. Full-text electronic scholarly and popular books are becoming available in online form, and a deluge of such materials and providers over the next few years is expected.

Diversity of user needs: The technology has changed expectations of researchers, their patience, and their willingness to accept services that are available on demand. The Web-based electronic resources are an apt answer to the expectations of users. Users want to have access to that material as quickly as possible, and many of them want information at their computer screens.

Improving quality standard of research: The research productivity of all institutions is expected to improve with increased access to international e-databases and full-text resources, so they are willing to add electronic resources to their collection and opting for consortia approach.

Impossibility of self-sufficiency: With the proliferation of information in myriad forms, it is difficult for any library to be fully sufficient to cater to the information needs of its user community. Financial constrains, space curb, human resources inadequacy also stress upon the need for the libraries to opt for the consortia approach.

Willingness of publishers: This approach has helped to get attractive discounted rates and most of publishers responded positively to the call of consortia and are enthusiastic to give the best possible offers. Another reason for the eagerness of publishers to enter the Indian market, which holds very high future potentials.

Future developments: One of the important issues related to technology is stability of the systems that they deploy to store, retrieve and deliver the electronic resources. Consortia help to have a watchful eye on coming latest technological changes in publishing industry and associated legislations which can affect the libraries directly or indirectly.

E-Consortia Approach to Harness Electronic Resources in India

The Library and information Centers, in India, are increasingly being called upon to provide more relevant, up-to-date and timely information to a wide range of users. To satisfy the varied user needs, libraries require availability and accessibility to a variety of electronic resources. Users expect their libraries to build and maintain a collection of electronic resources while simultaneously maintaining and growing traditional print collections. To cope with thorny problems of tremendous explosion of information, financial constraints, availability of information in different forms etc., the resource sharing networks has emerged as important alternatives. The advent of e-journals and e-databases coupled with high speed data communication facilities has paved the way for the present form of library consortia. Cooperation in form of e-consortia has emerged as an essential facet of modern library management in most developed countries of the world, but in our country it is still in the normative stage. The most important developments for academic libraries during the late 20th century is the move from organizational self-sufficiency to a collaborative survival move supported by the growth of library consortia. The concept of consortia is slowly picking up in India also. Few ventures like INDEST, UGC-INFONET, FORSA, CSIR Consortium, HELNET, NIC-MCIT, etc are successfully working in India and helping the librarians to expand the number of electronic resources. Some of the Indian consortium initiatives are briefly discussed below:-

UGC-INFONET initiative: The UGC-Infonet Digital Library Consortium was formally launched in December, 2003 by Honourable Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam, the then President of India. The major aims and objectives of the UGC-Infonet Digital Library Consortium are as follows :

- To subscribe electronic resources for the universities at a highly discounted rates of subscription and at the best terms and conditions.
- To extend the benefit of consortium-based subscription to all Indian universities and colleges
- To extend the benefit of consortium to associate members of this Consortium
- To impart training to the users, librarians, research scholars and faculty members of the institutions on the electronic resources with an aim to optimize their usage
- To have increased interaction amongst the member libraries
- To increase the research productivity of the institutions both in terms of quality and quantity of publications
- To evaluate the usage of the resources subscribed
- To identify new resources that are required to be subscribed under the programme based on the availability of resources and funds.

This ambitious venture includes interlinking universities and colleges throughout the country electronically with a view of achieve maximum efficiency through the Internet enabled teaching, learning and governing. UGC Infonet is dependent on the ERNET infrastructure in a manner so as to provide assured quality of service and optimal utilization of bandwidth resources. This consortium covers almost all subject disciplines including arts, humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, chemical Sciences, life sciences, computer sciences, mathematics and statistics, etc. The Consortium provides current as well as archival access to more than 4500 core and peer-reviewed journals and nine bibliographic databases from 23 publishers and aggregators in different disciplines. So far, 120 Universities in India, out of 171 that come under the purview of UGC, have been provided differential access to subscribed e-resources.

INDEST-Consortium: The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) set up the “Indian National Digital Library in Engineering Science and Technology (INDEST) Consortium” in 2003. The Ministry provides funds for access to electronic resources subscribed for the consortium to the 37 core members through the consortia

headquarters setup at the IIT, Delhi. The members includes 8 IITs and IISc, 20 NITs , ISM, SLIET and NERIST, 2 IIIT and IIITM, 7 IIMs and NITIE. AICTE provides funds for access to e-resources to (60) Government engineering colleges or technical institutions. 230 engineering colleges and institutions have already joined the consortium on their own. Recently, 461 engineering colleges and institutions joined under self support- new scheme with financial support from the AICTE. It subscribes to over 4000 e-journals from a number of publishers 7 and aggregators. The INDEST consortium is the most ambitious initiative taken so far in India. The main objectives is as:

- To subscribe to electronic journals (resources) for the members of the consortium at highly discounted rates of subscription and at the best of terms and conditions
- To extend the benefit of consortia based subscription beyond the core members to other engineering and technological institutions
- To impart training to the users and librarians of the member institutions on subscribed electronic resources with an aim to optimise the usage of electronic resources
- To find more avenues of cooperation and interaction among member libraries
- To increase interactions among member institutions
- To increase scientific productivity of member institutions in terms of quality and quantity of publications.

The INDEST Consortium, as an open-ended proposition, welcomes other institutions to join it on their own for sharing benefits it offers in terms of highly discounted rates of subscription and better terms of agreement with the publishers. All electronic resources being subscribed are available from the publisher's website. The consortium has an active mailing list and a website hosted. All IITs can access to major full text databases from different suppliers whereas some other institutions can access to only four full text databases. It offers access to multiple electronic resources from different reputed publishers. The resources subscribed under this consortium can be divided into two categories, Full text databases and Bibliographic databases. Following is a list of e-resources being offered under this project.

Consortium for e-Resources in Agriculture (CeRA): The National Agricultural Innovation Programme (NAIP) has established the Consortium for e-Resources in Agriculture (CeRA) with the support of Indian council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi. The establishment of CeRA under NAIP is a part of the ongoing activities of the unit of simulation and informatics (USI) set up in November 2003 by merging the unit of Applications System Simulation (UASS), the Bioinformatics Centre and Internet Facilities. The work plan of CeRA comprises the establishment of a Co-ordination cell, appointment of project personnel, installation and commissioning of a dedicated server for the Consortium, enhancing the bandwidth of Internet leased line, etc., installation and development of networking, development/adoption of a suitable software, identification of e-journals/publishers/ vendors, organization of workshops and trainings, monitoring, and impact analysis of CeRA functioning. Currently CeRA-Consortium has 123 members.

CeRA-Consortium provides access to 2000+ journals (electronic and Print) from several publishers from the following sources.

*200+ print journals from designated document delivery libraries;

*1800+ e-journals from the following participating publishers.

It covers six major subject fields including Agricultural & Biological Science; Arts & Humanities; Basic Sciences; Biomedical Sciences; Engineering & Technology (JET); Social & Management Sciences.

Following are the objectives:

- To develop the existing R & D information resource base of ICAR institutes/universities, etc., comparable to that existing in world leading institutions/organizations.
- To create an e-access culture among scientists/teachers in ICAR institutes/agricultural universities.
- To develop a Science Citation Index (SCI) facility at IARI for evaluation of scientific publications.
- To assess the impact of CeRA on the level of research publications measured through SCI.

CSIR Consortia: National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), New Delhi along with other laboratories of CSIR formed a consortium called “Consortium for CSIR Laboratories for Accessing E-journals”. The consortium started working in June 2002 after an agreement with the Elsevier Science for a period of four years for 1200 journals. CSIR has taken the major initiative in 10th five-year plan to form E-journal Consortium. The objectives behind this consortium are to strengthen the pooling, sharing and electronically accessing the CSIR library resources, to provide access to world S&T literature to CSIR laboratories and to nucleate the culture of electronic access resulting into evolution of digital libraries. Its activities range from creation to monitoring the accessibility of scientific periodicals published by the leading international institutions. NISCAIR, that has been entrusted the implementation of this project, aims at providing access to 4500 world class e-journals to all S & T personnel of CSIR through pooling and sharing resources. Finally agreements have been made with 20 publishers, facilitating access to 4500+ world-class e-journals; Patent databases such as Derwent Innovation Index, Delphion; Web of Science Bibliographic database, Indian standards and ASTM to all CSIR S&T staff, as against their print base of 20-200 journals.

FORSA Libraries Consortia: Forum for Resource sharing in Astronomy and Astrophysics (FORSA) was established in 1981. Members of FORSA include Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, National Center for Radio Astrophysics, Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Raman Research Institute, etc. It was formed for sharing of resources in areas common to R&D activities. It is to subscribing 25 electronic journals to Indian Astrophysics Consortium (Kluwer journals 2002+) and Nature Online (Nature Publishing 2002+).

Health Sciences Library and Information Science Network Consortium (HELINET): In 2001, the library of Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences realized that the resources like journals and books are expensive and building a comprehensive collection in every medical college is unaffordable. Thus, the birth of HELINET took place with the motto to network all the libraries under RGUHS for minimizing the cost of acquisition and maintenance of learning resources and maximizing their utilization among the faculty, students and researchers in the colleges and institutions affiliated to the university. About 600 scholarly international biomedical journals from 24 leading publishers, at about one-third price of their print subscription, have been procured online and are provided to all medical colleges in

Karnataka. Moreover, the member colleges can get all time access to the current journals as well as archives, i.e., the back-volumes of journals for a period of seven to 10 years. The university has spent about two crore rupees for establishing the consortium on a cooperative e-access model and is subscribing to Elsevier's Science Direct, Ovid Biomedical 10 Collection, Annual Reviews Biomedical Suite, J-Gate Custom Content for Consortia and J-Gate.

Benefits of E-Consortia: The present system of consortia has lot of merits over the earlier pattern of individual subscription to electronic resources. The main advantage of library consortia is resources enhancement and general cost savings. Few benefits are mentioned below:

1. Consortia-based subscription to electronic resources provides access to wider number of electronic resources at substantially lower cost. When subscribed through a consortium the cost per library can be significantly lower than what each library would pay in an independent agreement. The consortium, with its collective strength of participating institutions, has attracted highly discounted rates of subscription with most favorable terms of agreement.
2. The consortium usually offer better terms of licenses for use, archival access and preservation of subscribed electronic resources, which would not have been possible for any single institution.
3. Availability and monitoring of usage statistics, which helps libraries in accomplishment of future strategy.
4. Library consortia act as means to achieve electronic resources access to more users for a lesser price. For the library it is more-for-less bargain strategy.
5. By developing common e-resources databases libraries can have access to otherwise un-subscribed electronic resources.
6. A single interface and access point providing scope for electronic archive searching always provide an edge to the needy user.
7. Pooling of expertise in the resolving of complicated tasks e.g. in the implementation of modern technological applications is an added benefit.
8. The gateway portals provide customized solution not only to access the resource online but also access resources of other libraries participating in the consortium.
9. 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.

10. Cost of establishing digital library is reduced. Digital libraries are more near to the tech savvy users' mind and electronic resources paves bridges between sea of information and user community.

Conclusion

For providing the information services in the 21st century, it is the best way to subscribe information resources through consortia so that more and more libraries will get maximum information resources at lesser prices. The E-consortium directly or indirectly has benefited a number of institutions in India. With the launching of E-consortia approach in India, it has become possible for almost all the higher education institutions to get access to various electronic databases having quality journals in a wide range of disciplines. Thanks to the initiatives in forming "consortium arrangements", access to e-journals is increasingly facilitated. But this development is yet to be made for the public libraries and school libraries. Libraries have to realize that working together can accomplish far more than they can do individually. Any set of objectives will only be attained, if there is a willingness to unite together and to believe that more will be achieved through the hard work of the whole than at the individual level. In India, we are yet to get into the mainstream of consortia development for all kinds of libraries, which entail changes in attitudes and functions on the part of library professionals. By working with E-consortia as strategic partners, libraries can find highly effective solutions to help them answer the information question of the users. In the nutshell, consortia have pivotal role to play in management of electronic resources for India.

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