INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

Library Consortia: Bridging the Gap in the Availability of Information

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Abstract:
Libraries function as an essential component in higher education. Without proper information and knowledge infrastructure no education system can sustain the goals and objectives. Academic libraries are undergoing a rapid and dynamic revolution. Consortia's are formed with an objective to enhance the purchasing power of participating library in the present scenario of major financial crunch and escalating cost of resources in the electronic form. The librarians felt the urge to collaborate but also for enhanced information access and also to utilize the technology for resource sharing

1. Introduction

Libraries today are facing great demand for services while struggling with the challenges such as rise in the information resources ,high cost of library materials, high expectation from users, budget cuts etc. Library consortia are created to help libraries obtain prices by buying joint access for a greater number of users, expanding access to print and electronic collection and developing new services to meet their customers need. 'Library consortia" refers to the co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration between and among libraries for the purpose of sharing information resources. Consortia approach has emerged as the hallmark of libraries in order to harness electronic resources effectively. With the popularity of consortium mode of subscription, publishers have started working out best pricing models. Evaluation of consortium for collective subscription of electronic resources have brought a revolution in the way information is provided to the students, faculty and researchers in the academic libraries

2. Salient Features of Consortia

- It eliminates different problems faced by the librarians to provide various services to the users
- It helps to meet the thrust of information of faculty, students and researchers
- It helps to cope up with the newly generated knowledge published in different forms such as printed and non printed documents
- It collects all the documents published at the national and international level
- The collection of the consortium libraries enables each member to support scholarly research of its users

3. Objectives of library consortia

- Establishing a formal relationship between the members of the consortium in order to foster co-operation and communication
- Supporting the information needs of students and faculty through co-operation while encouraging each member to build good basic collection sufficient to meet the needs of its students ,faculty and researchers
- Promoting resource sharing and enhancing access to information, formulating appropriate collection development and acquisition policies and exploring opportunities for cost saving
- Facilitating access to information through shared computer systems and networks
- Utilizing appropriate and current technology and keeping abreast of new technological development
- Improving information literacy among students, faculty and researchers

4. Aims of Consortia

- To provide access to high quality and scholarly electronic resources to a large number of academic institutions
- To promote rapid and efficient access to scholarly content to the users and to create and promote the use of ICT in teaching and learning
- To promote interaction and inter library cooperation amongst the participating academic libraries

- To impart training to the users, librarians and faculty members of the institutions in use of electronic resources with the aim to optimize their usage
- To bring qualitative changes in teaching , learning and research with an aim to meet the ever growing challenges of globalization of higher education

5. Functions of Consortia
- Co-operative collection development among the member libraries
- Co-operative processing of information resources acquired through the consortium
- Creation of virtual digital library covering all e-information resources available to member libraries
- Compilation of bibliographic and full text data base of the holding of member libraries
- Sharing of information resources both tradition and digital
- Allowing reciprocal borrowing by members of all libraries
- Digitization of valuable and rare collection of library available in printed format and providing access to the members of all libraries of the consortia

6. Why Consortia
- Providing enhanced library services with an emphasis on access to new electronic resources, bibliographic databases and services offered through the Internet and world wide web
- Expediting inter library borrowing which has evolved into providing electronic resources
- To ensure that faculty and students have access to electronic resources across all consortia members

7. Considerations Needed to Form Consortia
- Technological infrastructure
- Resource identification
- Budget and funding
- Pricing issues
- Subscription payment issues
- Access related issues
- Licensing and copyright issues
- Availability of efficient staff
- Sustainability issues

8. Goals of Consortium
- Increased access base
- Rational utilization of funds
- Ensure the continuous subscription
- Qualitative resource sharing
- Avoid price plus models
- Enhanced image of the library
- Improve existing library services
- Harness development in information technology
- Cost sharing for technical and training support
- Increase user base

9. Consortia Models
- Open consortia-Libraries are free to join and leave as and when they please. Member libraries are usually homogenous in nature and require cross sharing of resources in a specific subject area
- Closed group consortia-This type of consortium by coalition, affiliation and collaboration among exclusive libraries
- centrally funded model-A parent body or the coordinating agency will have the financial responsibility for running the consortium
- Shared budget model-In this type management of funds and other aspects are handled individually by member libraries
- Publishers initiatives-Certain publishers' are also encouraging consortium formation by giving a deep discount in prices to the member libraries
- National consortium-this is model perceived at the national level which includes libraries from one country.

10. Role of Librarian in building up consortia
- Librarian who participates in any consortium need to equip themselves adequately about the concept of open access. It is essential to evaluate the usage of resources bargained through the consortium which will help the members to re-define their budgets to support open access journals as part of access through the consortium
- Librarian should try and build coalition and support within the academic community
- Librarians need to be proactive and dynamic to achieve the goals established at consortium
- Librarians should learn the art of delivering the digital content which includes the knowledge of different metadata
- Librarian should explore the possibility of cancelling any deal with the publishers/vendors where the cost is too high

11. Library Consortia in India
Academic libraries in India are facing problems like increasing demands, high expectations from users, budget cuts, high cost of library materials, and rise in the amount of information resources. It is impossible for a single library to provide access to all materials to meet the user's needs

11.1. UGC Infonet e journals consortium and INFLIBNET
It is an autonomous centre within UGC and is involved in creating the infrastructure for sharing library and information resources and services among academic and research institutions. It was initiated to facilitate free access to scholarly journals and database in all fields and disciplines by the research and academic community across the country through the joint partnership of UGC, INFLIBNET and ERNET. This includes interlinking universities and colleges in the country electronically with a view to achieving maximum efficiency through Internet enabled teaching, learning and governance.

11.2. CSIR consortiu
Many of the laboratories have well equipped libraries and some of them act as the main information centres for different subjects functioning as consultant libraries at the national level. Access to e journals through the use of the state of the art technology is possible in many of the libraries belonging to these laboratories .The objective of this consortia is to strengthen the pooling, sharing and electronically accessing the CSIR library resources, to provide access to world of science and technology literature to CSIR laboratories and to inculcate the culture of electronic access resulting into the evolution of digital library

11.3. INDEST CONSORTIUM
The ministry of Human resource development (MHRD) has set up the Indian National Digital Library in Science and Technology consortium. It endeavors to identify other e-resources relevant to the institutions and enables access under best subscription prices and license terms. With continuous monitoring of international development in this domain and liaison with agencies like ICOCL, INDEST tries to bring the best possible consortium based e-information services to its members . The electronic resources subscribed by INDEST are
- Elsevier Science Direct
- IEEE/IEE electronic library online
- Proquest
- Springer
- Nature
- Indian standards
- INSPEC
- JGate custom content for consortia(JCCC)
- Math SciNet
- SciFinder Scholar
- Web of Science

11.4. FORSA consortium
The Indian Astrophysics consortium called forum for Resource sharing in Astronomy (FORSA) is an example of homogenous group of members wherein the libraries have common areas of interest. It was established due to the proliferation of information, library professionals working in this institute felt the need to come together and to form a forum which can act as a spring board for sharing and exchanging of information

11.5. HELINET
Health Science library and information networks is hosted by Rajiv Gandhi University of Health science (RGUHS), Bangalore. The consortium was started with a vision to improve the quality of education and research in health science institutions of state through enhanced access to high quality medical education. It was set up with the objective of networking the college libraries affiliated to RGUHS to promote resources sharing especially with reference to international medical journals and database

11.6. ICICI Knowledge Park

Industrial credit and Investment Corporation of India. The master plan of the park mirrors its objective of nurturing an environment for innovations and the expected growth in life science and the related fields. It has a mix of ready to use multi tenanted modular wet innovation corridors with an inbuilt flexibility around some common, shared facilities and support services as well as land for customized Research and development facilities

11.7. IIM's Library consortium

It is a digital library network system based on the Internet technology to provide to the IIM community an online web enabled access to the information resources available in all the IIM's without any barriers of time and distance. IIM consortia identified two areas of partnership viz developing the collection on shared basis and developing the services exploiting such a collection. The consortia envisaged the operating principles of decentralized processing, acquisition and centralized utilization and access

11.8. UGC-DAE consortium for scientific Research

To promote interaction among the scientist working in the research centre's of the department of Atomic Energy and the faculty from the Universities and other institutions of higher learning and enable young students to work on programme of national importance under the joint guidance of the faculties from the universities and the scientist of DAS so as to nurture organic linkage between the university system and research centre of DAE , UGC and the Atomic Energy commission

12. Need for consortia

- Overloaded budgets-the libraries with their diminishing or static financial allocations have to consider new ways to consolidate globally accessible electronic resources. Consortia's are formed with an objective to enhance the purchasing power
- Information explosion-full text electronic scholarly and popular books are becoming available in online form. A consortium with the collection strengths of resources of various institutions available to it is in a better position to address and resolve the problems of managing, organizing and archiving electronic resources
- Impossibility of self sufficiency-with the proliferation of information in myriad form, it is difficult for any library to be self sufficient to cater to the needs of its user community
- Willingness of publishers-this approach has helped to get attractive discounted rates and most of the publishers responded to the call of consortia
- Diversity of user needs-the technology has changed expectations of researchers and their willingness to accept services that are available on demand. The web based electronic resources are an apt answer to the expectations of the users
- Quick access-The technology provides an unparallel media for delivering information with greater speed and economy
- Improving quality standards of research- the research productivity is expected to improve with increased access to international e-database and full text resources
- Professionalism of library science-The changing role of librarian as a conservator to a navigator /disseminator of information has enhanced the value of library consortia
- Future developments-one of the important issues related to technology is stability of the system that they deploy to store, retrieve and deliver electronic resources. Consortia helps to have a watchful eye on the coming of latest technological industry which can affect the librarians directly or indirectly

13. Advantages of Consortia

- Foster resource sharing-besides sharing of financial resources, members of consortia can share a variety of other resources like sharing catalogues, collection content creation, storage of resources, archiving or resources and staff expertise
- Enhanced library services to the users-O Connor described the benefits of consortia to be customer focused
- Improves quality of library services-Libraries turned to consortia as a way to share information and best practices and to reduce the unit cost of providing core services
- Increased financial benefit-One of the reasons that libraries join consortia is to gain some financial benefits
- Encourage for discussions, collective thinking and leadership-Intangible benefits such as the encouragement of discussion and collective thinking is a valuable part of being a member of the consortium. Consortium services manage more than the cost can do by providing leadership for its member that generates cooperative action for the advancement of educational environment and quality of services for the client of the library
- Demonstrates reduced cost-Any measures taken by a library to reduce cost taken by the stakeholders and the libraries tries to maximize their resources. To reduce the cost of member of library operation, consortia act as an agent on behalf of their members to seek a reduced group purchase price for information resources .
- Facilitates the change management-One of the most complex issues facing libraries today is change management. The decision face are becoming more complex, the risk are grater and the resources are both human and fiscal are becoming more spare. A library consortium is particularly valuable in managing the changes.

- Provides training and workshops-the consortium can play a valuable role by providing training and organizing news programs or promotional activities to upgrade the existing staff
- Enables better access-promotes better, faster and more cost effective ways of providing access to electronic information resources to the information seekers. Increasing amount of access to electronic resources possible across the institutions at a lower cost.
- Facilitates better management- consortia can manage the electronic information resources in a better way and save the library from the hassle of print resource management
- Sustain the pressure-successfully meets the pressure of diminishing budget, increased users' demand and rising cost of library resources
- Protects from duplication-Duplication of materials, cost, time and efforts can be minimized and by the same saving and access can be maximized.
- Accelerates sustainable growth of libraries-The collective strength of consortia members facilitates the libraries to get the equal benefits of wider access to electronic resources at an affordable cost and at the best terms and conditions.
- Benefits are manifolds-Facilitates ongoing communication, co-ordination, awareness, creates information, super highways, professional improvement, force to maintain standard, cultural broadness, increased visibility, preferred partnership, marketing and advertising opportunities.

14. Disadvantages of Consortia
- Consortia without legal entity-consortia of libraries need to have a legal entity with permission and authority to deal with institutions like banks, since it would involved in collecting subscription/membership amount from participating libraries so as to make payments to the electronic publishers
- Problems In budget allocation and funding-belong to a consortium means a part of library budge will be transferred to the consortia but it is difficult to know the consortia subscription cost of the available resource in advance
- Problems in transfer of funds-The consortia need to be pooled together from various participating libraries to make an effective shared subscription
- Lack of awareness and understanding-Librarians do not fully comprehend the concept of consortia based subscription to electronic resources and are not very keen to go whole heartedly for the formation of consortia among libraries
- Problems in local decision making and control-There is a fear that if a library joins in a consortium than local decision making autonomy and control will be adversely affected
- Egos and attitude-Egos and attitude of individuals or organizations can have a big impact on the success or failures of a consortium
- Speed of decision making-the speed of decision making of individual libraries can slow down. It depends how centralized or decentralized the consortium is
- Type of agreement-agreement between members can have a major impact on the consortium's effectiveness
- Technological compatibility and security-compatibility among the computers and communications systems of the participating members is very much required for a consortium to maximize the benefits of Information technology
- Multiple consortia membership-Individual libraries with multiple consortia membership can be a barrier to follow up actions and adjust with variant consortia cultures
- Geographic distance-Distant location of participating libraries may be a meaningful barrier to effective communications and discussions which is an essential ingredients for a successful consortium
- Specific institutional problems-Every institution/library has its own specific problems related to work culture, environmental differences, compromising attitudes, policies etc

15. Conclusion
Academic libraries have felt that consortia based subscription is cost effective and avoids redundant expenses and duplicate subscription. Library consortia provides for physical and electronic delivery of materials and integrating the collection development process which is a crucial step in moving towards the 21st century. Library consortia are considered as a coalition between libraries, publishers and vendors. Libraries have increasingly turned to consortia as a way of brokering better prices and rendering rapid and efficient services to information seekers. The library consortia are shifting from a peripheral and limited position of resource sharing to an integrated system under resource sharing

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