

Understanding the Library Consortium to Harness the Teaching, Research and Publication Activities*

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The success and survival of libraries will much depend on how much and to what extent the libraries cooperate with each other in future.

– Allen Kent

1. Introduction

A library consortium shares library resources among the patrons of group of organizations (libraries) on a pre-determined mutual policy and understanding. A library consortium could be of local, national or international level. This scope is possible because of the advent and increasing growth of information and communication technology. Now a day, library consortia are popular among the academic circles and their resources are widely tapped by academicians. Many Indian library consortia are popular among the researchers and academicians. They are: Library consortia of CSIR, FORSA, HELINET, IIM, INDEST, INFLIBNET's N-LIST, DAE etc. This trend has helped harness the teaching-learning, research and publication activities.

The paper introduces the advantages, disadvantages, features and utilities of the library consortium and its models *viz.* Open Consortia, Closed Consortia, Centrally Funded Model, Shared-Budget Model, Publisher Consortia Model and National Consortia Model. Though the consortium is useful, there are challenges both at policy and implementation level. The paper also highlights all such issues related consortia and gives relevant solutions and suggestions.

2. Concepts

Consortium is a Latin word, meaning 'partnership, association or society' and derives from consors 'partner', itself from con- 'together' and sors 'fate', meaning owner of means or comrade (Singh & Rao, 2008). A consortia is an association of two or more individuals, companies, organizations or governments (or any combination of these entities) with the objective of participating in a common activity or pooling their resources for achieving a common goal. (Singh & Rao, 2008).

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3. Evolution

Cooperation amongst institutions for sharing their library resources is being practiced for decades. Traditionally, the primary purpose of establishing a library consortium was to share physical resources including books and periodicals amongst members. However, the mode of cooperation has gone under a transformation with infusion of new information technology from print-based environment to digital environment (INFLIBNET, 2004, p. 1).

Figure-1: Evolution of Consortia

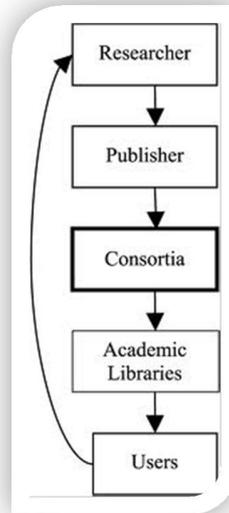


The emergence of Internet, particularly, the World Wide Web (WWW) as a new media of information delivery triggered proliferation of Web-based full-text online resources. Increasing number of publishers are using the Internet as a global way to offer their publications to the international community of scientists. The technology provides an unparalleled media for delivery of information with greater speed and economy. The libraries and information centres, as heavy consumers of electronic journals and online databases, stand to benefit greatly from this technology-driven revolution (INFLIBNET, 2004, p. 1).

4. Formation of Consortia

The following simple flowchart depicts how the Library consortium works. Firstly, the researchers/authors send their research articles/document to the publisher to publish the same in the latter's journals/books. The same procedure is followed with the authors and publishers. Depending upon the reputation, popularity and circulation of the journals/books, the publishers add the price tag to the same.

Figure-2: Formation of Consortia



Source: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>

Secondly, the academic libraries subscribe the journals/books from the publishers, if the subscription rates are affordable and within the limits of the budgetary back-up of the institute/library. So the subscription of the titles much dependent on the subscription rates. On the contrary, in view of the hefty subscription rates, the Libraries come together to break the financial barrier by collectively subscribing to the journals/database on a predetermined policy and agreement with the participating libraries as well as publisher/s. The consortium comes into limelight when the stakeholders agree to the same.

Thirdly, the users of the participating institutes/libraries access the journals/database under the consortium platform. The users refer the consortium resources for research and publication activities.

5. Advantages and Disadvantages

The Library consortium has become one of the best tools to share the invaluable information for research and development activities among the stakeholders. Gwenda and Fourie give some of the important utilities of building and accessing a consortium. The consortium:

- a) promotes formal relations between members to foster collaboration and networking;
- b) supports optimal access to information for members through regional and national co-operation;
- c) promotes collection building and resource sharing;
- d) provides support for the implementation and management of common library systems and

- e) improves information literacy skills and to share training resources and expertise (Gwenda & Fourie, n.d.).

In the similar lines, Yernagula and Kelkar (n.d.) observe the following utilities of a consortium.

- a) Consortia-based subscription to electronic resources provides access to wider number of electronic resources at substantially lower cost;
- b) Optimum utilization of funds.
- c) Facilities to build up digital libraries;
- d) Helpful to provide better library services like CAS and SDI;
- e) Cost Sharing for Technical and training support;
- f) Electronic journals demand neither library space nor shelving costs nor can they be stolen from the library;
- g) The consortium have been offered better terms of licenses for use, archival access and preservation of subscribed electronic resources, which would not have been possible for any single institution; and
- h) Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week;
- i) Economy in maintain (Yernagula & Kelkar).

Despite all the above advantages, the Library consortium poses some challenges which make the implementation and use ineffective. The disadvantages of consortium are that:

- a) the consortium is accessible online, thus there is an absence of a printed copy of journals/documents;
- b) it requires extensive training of staff in handling the electronic documents online;
- c) consortium requires high initial investments in obtaining licenses and procuring the tools and expert manpower for information and communication technology;
- d) copyright problems may arise while using/citing the consortia-driven literature;
- e) there are chances of unreliable telecommunication links and insufficient bandwidth;
- f) lack of archiving and back files availability and
- g) Internet access is necessary as to run the consortium; (Yernagula & Kelkar).

6. Need of Library Consortium

Due to financial crunch and the rising costs of journals, many research/scientific libraries cannot subscribe to all the required journals and databases. Libraries formed consortia to overcome the problem and share the resources. Sharing electronic resources have become necessity of individual libraries due to their decreasing excellence. Libraries in consortia have discovered that as a group, they have a combined set of resources of a single library. Membership in a consortium allows a group of libraries to pool their financial resources to leverage greater control over market place. Consortia enable the library to improve quality of

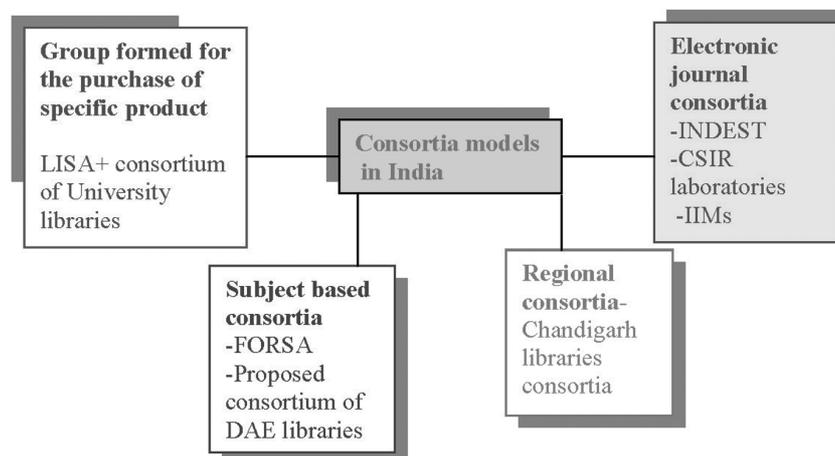
services offered to their patrons by enhancing collections and by increasing access to information (Ratnakar, Prerna, & Satyanarayan, 2009).

On other hand, the consortium is *sine qua non* for teaching, research and publications. The sources of information which are easily accessible through consortium, help in improved access to the resources. The use of the consortium by the teachers enhances improved teaching and the students in turn start taking interest in using the information sources available under the consortium. The use of consortium by the research scholars enhances the scope of the research study by understanding the horizon of research literature through consortium. It also makes the research scholar's findings/results more authentic. The consortium also acts as a motivating tool for the academicians/researchers to write research papers. The sources referred from the consortium make the papers more authentic and thus attracts the publishers/editors to publish the same in the books/journals.

7. Consortia Models/Types

The consortia models/types are categorized on the basis of subject of the e-resources (Physics or Chemistry or Social Science or all fields etc.), type of e-resources (e-journals or e-books or electronic theses and dissertations or working papers etc.), geographical locations (Delhi public libraries consortia or Maharashtra research libraries consortia etc.). The following chart depicts these categories with examples (of Indian consortia).

Figure-3: Models of Consortia



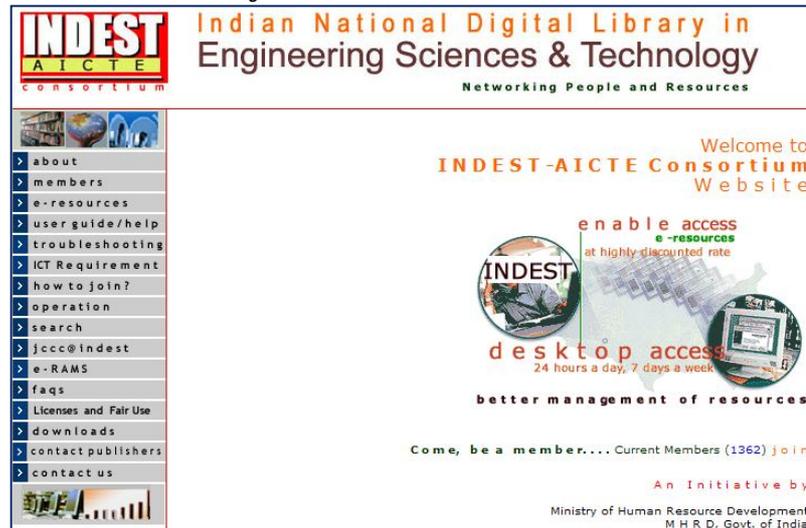
Source: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com>

Sreekumar and Sunitha (p.61) systematically explain six other formal categories of consortia that are discussed below.

i. Open consortia: This type of consortia is open ended and provides facility for the libraries to join and leave as they please. In this case, publishers define a

minimum number of libraries for the consortium to take-off, at a specific rate per product. This type of consortia are generally driven by small homogeneous groups who have a need to cross-share the resources in a specific subject area. INDEST Consortium run by the Ministry of HRD, GOI, is an example to this.

Figure-4: Screenshot of INDEST Consortia



Source: <http://indest.iiita.ac.in/>

ii. Closed group consortia: The closed group consortium stays exclusive within a defined group. This type of consortia emerges either by coalition, affiliation and collaboration among them (CSIR, DAE, IIM Consortium). Here the formation and operation of the consortia guidelines and its administration are fairly simple and easy.

iii. Centrally funded model: In this model, the very existence of the consortium will solely depend on the central funding agency. The strength of this model is that the financial responsibility of running the consortium is shouldered by the parent body. INDEST, UGC INFONET, CSIR, ICMR Consortia etc. are examples of this model.

iv. Shared-budget model: In this model the participating libraries take the lead and form the consortium. IIM and FORSA are examples of this model. The operational aspects of the consortium especially the management of funds etc. are individually handled. Entering into an MoU for a better and strong footing is always recommended for this of this model.

Figure-6: Screenshot of IIM Consortium

The screenshot shows the website for the Library & Information Center (LIC) of the IIM Consortium. The header includes the LIC logo and the text 'Library & Information Center (LIC)'. A navigation menu contains links for Home, About the LIC, Databases, E-journals, Catalogues, Services, Ask a Librarian, and Useful Links. The main content area is titled 'THE IIM CONSORTIUM' and contains the following text:

The year 2000 was a landmark in the history of IIMs, with the formation of the IIM Consortia. IIMK took leadership in the formation of the IIM Consortia, and had the first meeting in Calicut. The objective was to ensure among the IIMs, optimum utilization and enhancement of the resources, and to minimise the expenditure by consortia based subscriptions to the commonly subscribed databases and journals. The idea was to approach publishers of CD-ROM Databases to begin with, as a consortia, for better pricing and services. Eventually, other digital databases and journals were also planned to be covered by the programme. The meetings were proved to be very productive and successful. During the first meeting itself, a host of databases were jointly purchased at very competitive prices, and a number of others promised supply of their products at a nominal cost.

In the case of journals, all the six IIMs put together subscribes to over 2550 scholarly titles of which around 1200 are duplications (overlapping titles). Among these, 33 titles are being subscribed to by all the IIMs. Having convinced on the dire need for a journals consortia, major publishers such as Elsevier, Kluwer, Wiley, Blackwell and MCB University Press were approached and they all represented in the second meet which was held at IIM Bangalore in 2001. The end result has been highly praiseworthy, that over 740 E-journals IIMs are able to get online access, across all the IIMs, by paying a nominal additional amount. The table below shows the salient features of the digital subscriptions at IIMK based on the IIM Consortia.

The present information resource base of the IIM Consortia is as follows:

IIM Consortia Resources	
1	Blackwell Hss Collection
2	Capitaline
3	Nexis.com+Corporate Information
4	ISI Emerging Markets
5	Kluwer Online
6	Talyor & Francis
7	John Wiley

Source: <http://www.iimk.ac.in/libportal/iimconsortium.htm>

v. National consortium: This is a conceptual model or a framework as far as India is concerned, which is not being seriously attempted by any of the ongoing consortia in the country. There are some isolated efforts from UGC Infonet and INDEST in this regard, but they are yet to make any significant strides. National level licensing of information products could be achieved towards this end.

vi. Publisher initiatives: In addition to the above, India has seen publisher-initiated consortia models too, coming up in the recent years. The Emerald Full-Text Library published by the Emerald Publishing Group (formerly MCB University Press) is an example to this. Here, the publisher offered a deep discounted consortium price to the participating libraries on a national level. The pre-condition was that there should not be any drop in their print subscriptions. It is hoped that several such initiatives will be coming up from publishers' side in the near future.

8. Challenges For Library And Information Centres

The availability of IT-based electronic information products are exerting ever-increasing pressure on libraries, which, in turn, are committing larger portions of their budgetary allocation for either procuring or accessing web-based online

full-text search services, CD-ROM products and online databases. The libraries with their diminishing or at the best static financial allocations have to consider new ways to consolidate global resources amongst them in order to maximize their limited financial resources. The combination of these developments has resulted in the development of "shared subscription" or "consortia-based subscription" to journals everywhere in the world (INFLIBNET, 2004, p. 1).

Apart from this, the following issues are serious concern for the library and information centres.

- a) Libraries need to manage data and metadata about e-resources which are acquired and accessed;
- b) libraries need to select, evaluate, acquire, maintain and provide informed access to e-resources in accordance with business and license terms;
- c) to assess usability of e-resource from its trial access or other member feedback;
- d) use analysis and then to renew or terminate;
- e) to deal with restricted access policy and imposed technological control;
- f) volatility of content is an issue;
- g) to monitor product performance and prevent misuse by any user for commercial gain through systematic downloads;
- h) to have budget control and timely renewal or termination of subscribed resources;
- i) to ensure right and timely access to right user and
- j) to deal with built in lack of standardisation in various databases with respect to their user interface, search tools, and usage measurement (Sinha, 2009) .

9. Popular Indian Consortia:

The use of Library consortia among Indian academic and research arena is quite successful. Indian organizations especially special libraries and research institutes are popular. The organizations like the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA), Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), Raman Research Institute (RRI), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Department of Atomic Energy (DAE), National Medical Library (NML) under Director General Health Services (DGHS), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) have established consortia to share electronic access to journal literature (Ratnakar, Prerna, & Satyanarayan, 2009, p. 7).

10. Conclusion

To conclude, the Library consortium is the best tool to minimize the cost against subscription of scholarly literature and maximize the use of the same. However, there are various consortium related issues like uninterrupted online access,

perpetual access to back issues, pricing, licensing, copyright and archival solutions etc have to be considered. These need to be strategically tackled and well addressed to get the best out of the consortia (Sreekumar & Sunitha). It is a good trend that academic libraries have really understood that consortia based subscriptions is cost effective and also avoids redundant expenses and duplicate subscriptions. The effort of UGC-INFONET and INDEST–AICTE Consortium are appreciable and will definitely strengthen higher education system in India free and or highly subsidized access to scholarly e-resources will help educational institutions in fulfill their mission in to reality.

In the long run, consortia approach will be much more popular in user community and that day is not so far behind when consortia approach will expand the country's information base (Bajpai, Mal, & Bajpai, 2009, p. 502). On other hand, cooperation is an essential facet of modern library management in most developed countries of the world, but our country is still in the normative stage. Tremendous explosion of information, financial constraints, information in different forms, etc., have necessitated resource sharing networking as an important alternative. In the light of the above, establishment of better consortium, integrating intellectual access are all the important steps for moving towards the 21st century libraries. Indian librarians should seriously rethink and reinstate consortium movement like western countries for maximum utilisation of resources at a reduced cost, time, and space (Ratnakar, Prerna, & Satyanarayan, 2009, p. 9). Considering these observations, the survival of the libraries greatly depends on mutual sharing of the sources of information. Hence the above quote by Allen Kent is quite appropriate and meaningful.

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