One Nation, One Subscription Implementation in India: Issues, Opportunities and Challenges for Librarians

Pavan Agarwal[1]; Sanjeev Kumar Sharma[2]

The LNM Institute of Information Technology ,Rupa ki Nangal, Post-Sumel, Via-Jamdoli, Jaipur, Rajasthan[1]; Madhav University, Post office – Bharja Tehsil, Abu Road, Pindwara, Rajasthan, India[2]

pavangwl71@gmail.com, sharmasanjeev562@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

According to the One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) policy that is being implemented by the government of India, all people of India should have easy access to digital academic content that is priced at a reasonable level, regardless of where they live or their socioeconomic standing. In this article, we take a look at the significant role that library and information science professionals had in the implementation of ONOS. Specifically, we examine how these professionals contributed to the formulation of policies, collaborated with various stakeholders, negotiated licenses, managed legal and copyright issues, and coordinated library networks. The curation of digital collections, the provision of user support and digital literacy training, and the assessment of the initiative's impact for the goal of continuous improvement are all important roles that library and information science (LIS) professionals play in the process of responding to the expectations of users. Although ONOS aims to democratise access to academic resources and foster a culture of innovation and lifelong learning, existing library consortia are having trouble adhering to its principles. As a consequence of the strategy, organisations may choose to directly negotiate access to publishers via the government. This could alter the dynamics of resource sharing and eliminate the need for consortia. On the other hand, if the government were to get engaged, library consortia may see cost reductions and improvements in their capacity to remain sustainable. Through an examination of these opportunities and challenges, this paper highlights the crucial role that librarians play in comprehending and adjusting to the shifting academic communication environment brought about by ONOS, as well as ensuring that it is effectively implemented for the benefit of India's research and academic communities.

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KEYWORDS: One Nation One Subscription (ONOS), Digital Content Access India, Library and Information Science (LIS) Professionals, Academic Subscription Policy, Library Consortia Challenges, Scholarly Communication India.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian government is the driving force behind the One Country, One Subscription (ONOS) initiative, which is a major step towards democratising access to academic digital resources throughout the whole country[1]. The development of knowledge societies needs to guarantee that all individuals have equitable and affordable access to academic resources. This is especially true in this day and age, when information serves as a major engine for education, research, and innovation. ONOS intends to erase geographical and economic barriers by developing a single subscription system[2]. This would allow for the provision of subsidised access to a large variety of digital publications and databases for all citizens, researchers, students, and academic institutions located across India. The implementation of ONOS will have a huge impact not only on the whole library system in the country but also on the individuals who are employed in the area of library and information science (LIS), which is one of the most important fields in terms of the dissemination of information. Educators, policy advocates, managers of digital information, and those who are responsible for the preservation of print collections are just a few of the responsibilities that librarians play in today's society[3]. There are several major areas in which LIS professionals have the potential to make a significant contribution to the success of ONOS. These include the creation of policies, the administration of digital collections, the education of users, and the coordination of infrastructure among academic institutions and libraries.

In spite of the fact that ONOS has the potential to provide a multitude of advantages, such as simplified access to scholarly resources, reduced membership costs, and the establishment of a culture that encourages the sharing of information via collaborative efforts, it also has a number of important disadvantages[4]. The initiative has the potential to shake up library consortia, which have been significant for a long time since they allow for the pooling of resources and the negotiation of pay and benefits amongst members. Because of the possible influence that the transition towards a government-led, centralised subscription might have on the autonomy of the consortia, there have been concerns voiced about the long-term sustainability of the consortia as well as the operational dynamics of the organisation[5]. The tough task of managing digital literacy programs in order to make the most of increasing access, balancing copyright and legal difficulties with user requests, and always reviewing the outcomes of ONOS in order to make it better is another responsibility that falls on the shoulders of librarians[6].

It is essential that users from all walks of life, regardless of their financial situation or level of education, have access to digital resources and are able to make effective use of them in order for inclusive knowledge ecosystems to develop[7]. This article dives into the multifaceted role that librarians play in the process of implementing ONOS by analysing the challenges and difficulties that they face, the opportunities that are made available by enhanced digital access, and the strategies that are required to overcome hurdles[8]. In order to guarantee that ONOS achieves its objective of making academic knowledge cost-effective and easily available to each and every Indian citizen, as well as paving the way for a society that is more knowledgeable and innovative, it emphasises the significance of the engagement of LIS professionals in the process of bridging policy and practice.

OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate how library and information science (LIS) specialists contribute to India's successful One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) program.

2. To determine the main problems, chances, and difficulties that librarians and library consortiums have while adjusting to the ONOS policy in order to provide fair access to digital academic resources.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate past studies on the topic of librarians' and library consortiums' experiences with the One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) initiative in India. The study focusses on the experiences of librarians and library consortiums. The information was gathered from a broad variety of reliable online sites, including government policy documents, reports from library organisations, scientific publications, and news items, among other sources[9]. Through careful examination of these resources, we were able to get a deeper comprehension of the ONOS program as well as the duties, challenges, and possible solutions that are associated with the LIS community. Additionally, the research investigates how ONOS influences the traditional subscription systems of libraries, specifically focussing on the operation of library consortia and determining whether or not they are capable of being maintained in the future. In India's library business, this document-based research offers light on the real-world consequences of ONOS as well as the future use of this technology.

RESULT

India's Research Output and Accessibility

In recent years, there has been a huge increase in the amount of research that has been conducted in India. According to databases from across the globe, India eclipsed both China and the United States to become the third-largest producer of research articles globally in 2022. This was accomplished by publishing more than 160,000 research papers in English during the year. This growth is a reflection of the growing financing for scientific and academic research that is being provided by a variety of government bodies and university institutions.

In spite of the fact that there is an increasing quantity of research, a great number of Indian researchers and institutions continue to confront substantial difficulties when it comes to gaining access to academic literature[10]. Many educational institutions, especially those located in economically deprived regions, are unable to get access to academic databases and journals since they need a subscription in order to access the great majority of scholarly work. Because of this restricted access, it is more difficult for academics to stay abreast of the most recent findings, and it also limits Indian research from being disseminated internationally.

In response to these needs, a number of libraries in India have established consortiums and institutional repositories in order to facilitate the sharing of resources and the accessibility of research materials that are available. On both a national and worldwide scale, there is a growing tide of support for open access publishing, which assures that scientific information may be accessible without restriction and without restriction[11].

In light of these challenges, the One country, One Subscription (ONOS) initiative has arisen as an essential response; its stated purpose is to guarantee that all inhabitants of the country have quick and affordable access to a broad range of digital academic publications. This program has emerged as an important answer. Through the implementation of ONOS, libraries will be able to collaborate more efficiently, remove the needless duplication of journal subscriptions, and provide a level playing field for all users, regardless of their location or affiliation[12].

Before adoption can be considered a success, however, there are a number of issues that need to be resolved. These issues include licensing agreements, financial matters, and the significance of librarians and library consortia in the process of coordinating efforts among many stakeholders.

Overview of One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) and Its Goals

With the implementation of the One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) initiative, which has been suggested by the Government of India (GoI), access to scientific and academic material on a national and international scale would be made accessible throughout the whole country. When ONOS follows through on its ambitions to acquire national licenses with the world's premier STEM publishers and database businesses, there will be an increase in the amount of scientific research and technological innovation that takes place[13]. Through the use of public libraries, it is anticipated that every citizen of the country, as well as educational and research institutions such as universities, colleges, and research organisations, would take use of this initiative.

The objectives of the 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) initiatives are:

1. Equitable Access: All residents of India, regardless of their geography or socioeconomic status, would have equal access to digital material and services, according to the initiative's stated goal. Its goal is to level the playing field when it comes to digital resource access by consolidating subscriptions and offering a single platform.

2. Cost Reduction: By negotiating bulk licensing arrangements with content producers, the program seeks to cut costs for educational institutions and libraries. The project's overarching goal is to increase the availability and affordability of digital resources by establishing a centralised subscription model and grouping together existing resources[14].

3. Collaboration and Resource Sharing: Libraries, organisations, content producers, and tech suppliers all work together under the ONOS project. To get the most out of the digital tools at our disposal, we're trying to build collaborations and encourage exchange of resources. The initiative's goal is to improve the collection as a whole and enable users access to a wide variety of information by promoting cooperation.

4. Enhanced Learning and Research: The program's overarching goal is to improve academic performance by making available an extensive library of digital materials. Academic endeavours, new knowledge discovery, and user access to relevant and current information across disciplines are the goals[15].

5. Digital Inclusion: To make sure that everyone, no matter where they are or what their background is, can access digital resources, the ONOS effort is trying to close the digital gap. Through the promotion of digital inclusion, its aim is to provide people with the resources they need to actively engage in the digital era.

6. Streamlined Access and User Experience: The project's eventual goal is to develop an easy-to-use system for getting digital information and services. Making it simpler for people to find, access, and use digital resources efficiently is its overarching goal, along with simplifying the subscription process and improving navigation[16].

LIS professional role in ONOS implementation

To ensure the successful implementation and proper administration of the "One Nation, One Subscription" program, Library and Information Science (LIS) experts play a crucial role. Some important jobs they may perform are as follows:

1. Policy Development and Advocacy: 'One Nation, One Subscription' campaigns are spearheaded by LIS experts who also draft and advocate for relevant policies. In order to create regulations that allow for uniform access to digital information, they collaborate closely with governmental agencies, library groups, and other interested parties. Legal and copyright concerns, content provider licensing negotiations, and user privacy rights advocacy are all part of this.

2. Collaboration and Partnerships: The 'One Nation, One Subscription' initiative cannot be successfully implemented without the close cooperation and coordination of libraries, content producers, and technology suppliers. Building these connections is an important responsibility of LIS practitioners. They make it easier for libraries to work together by negotiating contracts, standardising material acquisition and sharing, and simplifying the subscription process. Librarians and information science experts provide a solid foundation for users to easily access digital resources by establishing strong collaborations.

3. Collection Development and Management: In order to make sure that 'One Nation, One Subscription' projects are successful, LIS experts contribute their knowledge in collection creation and management. They determine what different types of users require in terms of knowledge and then put up an extensive library of digital resources to meet their demands. Professionals in library and information science (LIS) choose, assess, and cull digital materials to guarantee that libraries provide users with high-quality resources that meet their academic, cultural, and leisure needs[17].

4. User Support and Digital Literacy: Providing user assistance and promoting digital literacy are two of the primary roles of library and information science (LIS) professionals in carrying out 'One Nation, One Subscription' programs. They guide patrons through the subscription platform, ensuring that patrons have efficient access to and usage of digital resources. Training sessions and seminars are organised by LIS experts to improve digital literacy abilities. This ensures that users can make the most of the resources that are accessible to them. Ethical information usage, appraisal, and retrieval are all included in their recommendations.

5. Assessment and Continuous Improvement: Evaluation of the results and significance of 'One Nation, One Subscription' programs is an important responsibility of library and information science (LIS) experts. In order to find places that might be improved, they collect user comments, examine use data, and do assessments. Their results inform suggestions for improving the subscription model, adding to the collection, and making the user experience even better. Librarians and information science experts keep library programs useful and relevant for users by keeping an eye on them and making adjustments as needed. In order to make sure that everyone in the country has equal access to digital resources, LIS experts are bringing their knowledge of information organisation, access, and user services to the "One Nation, One Subscription" initiative.

Benefits of ONOS For Library And User Audiences

Collaborative projects like digitisation, collaborative acquisition, and interlibrary lending are examples of the kinds of work that library consortia do. Among the many advantages of these consortia are:

1. Improved Access to Resources: The resources available to member institutions of a library consortium are more extensive and diverse than those available to any one institution working alone. Libraries may offer their users a wider selection of books, journals, and other resources by working together to purchase and share resources.

2. Cost Savings: Library consortias are able to get better subscription prices for electronic resources and other products because they combine their resources. In turn, this helps the member institutions save money, which they may then put to better use.

3. Sharing of Expertise: Through library consortia, libraries are able to collaborate, exchange resources, and learn from one another. Library services and collection quality may both be improved via this exchange of information and expertise.

4. Collaborative Initiatives: Digital preservation efforts and interlibrary lending services are two examples of the kinds of joint endeavours that library consortia might launch. In the long run, this may help the member libraries' collections and services become better[18].

5. Resource Optimization: The goal of library consortia is to maximise efficiency by reducing or eliminating wasteful duplication of services and materials. In turn, this helps libraries make better use of their funding.

Community Building: Another benefit of library consortias is the feeling of community they foster among participating institutions. Libraries may build connections and encourage a spirit of cooperation via hosting joint events, seminars, and other collaborative activities. When it comes to maximising the use of resources, improving the quality of library collections and services, and increasing access to those resources, library consortia are invaluable. Consortia are a great way for libraries to work together and assist academic pursuits like research and teaching.

Challenges ONOS For Library And User Audiences

The 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) program has its limits and has obstacles when implemented in library systems. To name a few major obstacles and restrictions:

1. Infrastructure Constraints: A major obstacle to the easy access and use of digital information is the inadequate internet infrastructure and connection in certain areas. Particularly in rural or underdeveloped regions, the project may fail to take off due to poor internet access.

2. Copyright and Licensing Issues: It may be a tedious and time-consuming process to negotiate copyright compliance and licensing arrangements with content suppliers. In order to protect the rights of content producers while facilitating lawful access to digital materials, libraries must decipher copyright laws and resolve licensing concerns[19].

3. Financial Constraints: Libraries and other organisations may still face budgetary limitations despite the ONOS initiative's best efforts to lower costs via centralised subscriptions. They may not be able to subscribe to as many digital resources or invest in necessary infrastructure upgrades to support the effort to its fullest extent due to financial constraints.

4. User Awareness and Digital Literacy: There may be a lack of knowledge of and proficiency with internet resources among many users, especially in underprivileged communities. In order to make the most of the project and make sure that digital resources are used effectively, it is vital to promote digital literacy and provide users enough training and assistance.

5. Technical Compatibility and Integration: When it comes to the integration and interoperability of different digital platforms and systems, libraries could face certain technological difficulties. Implementing the ONOS program seamlessly with preexisting library systems and procedures need for meticulous preparation, specialised knowledge, and continuous support[20].

6. Content Diversity and Specialized Needs: Although the program's stated goal is to make a variety of digital materials available, it may be difficult to meet the demands of all users and guarantee diversity. There may be a need for libraries to meet the need for resources that are specialised to certain fields, languages, or user populations.

7. Data Privacy and Security: Ensuring the privacy and security of user data is essential for the successful execution of the ONOS program. In order to keep patron information secure and keep their confidence, libraries should implement stringent data security procedures and follow all applicable privacy laws.

Investing in infrastructure, enhancing librarian and user capacity, collaborating with material suppliers, and continuously evaluating and adapting the project are proactive steps that may be taken to address these restrictions and obstacles. Successfully implementing the ONOS program and making its advantages known to libraries and users throughout India depends on overcoming these hurdles[21].

ONOS Effect on Library Consortiums

Since "One Nation One Subscription" (ONOS) is still in its early stages of implementation, it is unclear what effect it will have on the long-term viability of library consortia in India. On the other hand, ONOS may influence library consortia sustainability in a few ways:

1. Competition for Subscriptions: It is possible that library consortia and the government-led effort would compete for subscriptions when ONOS is implemented. Because of this, library consortia may have less leverage when bargaining with publishers for better subscription prices.

2. Funding Availability: It is possible that libraries may have less money to spend on electronic resource subscriptions if ONOS is successful in making digital material cheap for people throughout the nation. Library consortia, which depend on operating funds from member universities, may not be able to weather this storm[22].

3. Collaborative Opportunities: Conversely, library consortia may find new avenues for collaboration with the government-led program via ONOS. To better serve their members' needs for digital material, library consortia should form partnerships with ONOS to negotiate subscription agreements and increase member access.

4. Expansion of Membership: The number of organisations and people looking to access digital material might rise if ONOS is able to lower its prices and make it more accessible. Library consortia may find new avenues for membership growth and project collaboration as a result of this[23].

Duplication of Solutions and Journal Subscriptions

A large portion of India's public sector budget goes towards paying for duplicate journal subscriptions. This is because many government agencies and nonprofits pay for the same publications, which results in a waste of money[24]. The "Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR)" found that certain Indian universities and organisations duplicate their journal subscriptions by subscribing to up to twenty thousand journals. The research suggests that Indian educational institutions would save as much as Rs. 300 crores (about $40 million) every year if they stopped subscribing to the same journals. In addition, according to the "National Digital Library of India study (2019)"8, 10, the average annual expenditure on journal subscriptions by Indian colleges was Rs. 1 crore (about 135,000 USD), with certain institutions paying as much as Rs. 25 crores (approximately 3.3 million USD) each year. Colleges and universities may have less money for student grants and research facilities if they have to pay a lot for journal subscriptions[25]. Therefore, the Indian government and public institutions must move immediately to avoid spending money on duplicate journal subscriptions. By consolidating journal subscription purchases, sharing

subscriptions across departments and organisations, and routinely evaluating the usefulness and relevance of subscribed publications, institutions may save money and make the most of their resources.

Prevention of Journal Duplication

Currently, several government departments and groups are paying to subscribe to a variety of journals. Create a list of all of these journals. When this is done, it will be easier to identify instances of duplication and overlap[26]. The purchase of journal subscriptions ought to be the responsibility of organised groups or organisations. By adopting this, it is possible to obtain lower prices and fewer instances of duplication. It is recommended to initiate a process that would allow different departments of the government and academic bodies to combine their journal subscriptions. This might be accomplished by the use of a centralised database, which would provide approved individuals access to the journals that they need. Investigate the possibilities that are available to the public. Open access is a system of publishing that is used by several academic journals in order to make their articles freely available on the internet. Two potential courses of action are the provision of public financing for the formation of new open-access journals and the provision of incentives for academics to publish in current journals[27]. Develop a method that will allow you to verify the usefulness and relevance of the publications that you subscribe to on a regular basis. We may be able to prevent the renewal of subscriptions to publications that are no longer interesting or helpful if we take this course of action.

Commercial and Policy Views

It is of the utmost importance that the government come to a consensus about the requirements and commercial interests of publishing companies[28]. Commercial publishers are always able to more successfully enforce their economic interests when dealing with smaller institutions or individuals, in contrast to larger groupings, consortia institutional libraries, a single hub for all of the institutions, and other similar entities. Another contentious issue will be whether or not the idea can be implemented in a broad sense. A central committee may be reluctant to join if it only negotiates with a limited number of major publications[29]. This may cause many smaller publishers to be reluctant to join. Concerns were voiced by the "Access to Knowledge and Resources" group, which was established in order to create the Science and Technology, Innovation Policy 2020. The group expressed their worry on the difficulties of reaching a conclusion without knowing which publishers would agree and what their expectations are. It was pointed out by the group that this information is absent, despite the fact that the idea is appealing[30]. It is imperative that we take measures to ensure that the amount that is to be paid does not place an undue burden on taxpayers, despite the fact that the objective is admirable and highlighted further. However, there are legitimate concerns about the lack of transparency that exists within the process. As an example, there has been a very limited amount of news on the talks up to this point. Without a shadow of a question, the willingness of the publishers to engage in conversations about subscriptions spread throughout a number of states is a crucial component of the practicality of the plan. Nevertheless, if this strategy is successful, India would be the first country in the world to provide access to paywalled resources for all of its citizens before any other nation. A little over 1.3 billion individuals will benefit from this.

Issues with ONOS Implementation

Due to the sheer size of India, which includes its enormous population and a large number of educational institutions, it is of utmost importance to comprehend that choosing a single, all-encompassing buy over the whole nation would not be a simple task. Policies that are comparable to ONOS have been successfully implemented in Uruguay and Egypt, both of which are far smaller than India. Due to the fragmentation of journal subscriptions in India, which is generated by the country's many institutions and consortia, it is more difficult to determine a single cost for an international subscription in India. It is possible that publishers would choose not to participate in such a significant contract due to the logistical obstacles involved in reaching India's enormous population[31]. In addition, there is a possibility that there may be problems with the administration and implementation of the national subscription. These problems may include ensuring that all institutions with varying research specialisations get what they need or distributing resources in an equitable manner. There is a possibility that the policy is not a fair deal. This is due to the fact that the majority of publishers have adopted a model in which academics are required to pay to have their papers published online and then paying again to have their publications made available. It would be prudent to conduct an examination into the rising number of famous academics who are of the opinion that the public sector ought to encourage high-quality scholarly journals and preprint publishing rather than wasting enormous amounts of money on national subscriptions than they are currently doing.

Opportunities

Librarians and the academic community in India stand to gain a great deal from the many opportunities that will become available as a direct consequence of the One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) scheme. Through the provision of a standardised system that ensures all Americans have access to credible research journals and databases, it helps to close the gap that exists between institutions that have a lot of money and those that have very little at their disposal. With the implementation of ONOS, librarians will have access to a greater number of strategic responsibilities in the areas of user education, digital content management, and resource planning at the national level. In addition to fostering professional growth in digital literacy and licensing negotiations, the objectives of this program include enhancing the visibility and utilisation of academic material, boosting collaboration among institutions and libraries, and encouraging professional development in these areas. ONOS serves to build a research culture by reducing financial and institutional barriers that prevent academics, students, and educators in all areas from gaining access to the most recent scientific knowledge. This is in addition to the fact that it strengthens India's research infrastructure and promotes academic parity.

CONCLUSION

Through the groundbreaking "One Nation, One Subscription" (ONOS) scheme, it may be possible to obtain more equitable access to academic content throughout the whole of India, especially in education institutions that are lacking in resources. The use of this technique presents librarians with both benefits and drawbacks. The fact that it can increase users' access to high-quality digital content, reduce the amount of duplicate subscriptions, and allow the cooperative library services are one of the beneficial aspects of this technology. However, it also raise questions about the future of existing library consortiums, the challenges of integrating institutional procedures, and the need for qualified library information systems professionals to supervise content management, licencing negotiations, and user help. In their capacity as major stakeholders, librarians are required to strategically adapt and make use of their

expertise to guarantee that ONOS is implemented in a manner that is both successful and accessible to everyone. The proactive participation of these individuals would be essential to overcome the limitations imposed by institutions, finances, and technology to establish ONOS as a significant figure in India's academic and research landscape.

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