

Power in Partnership: The Role of Consortia in Shaping Research and Innovation

H.G., Srikanth

Librarian, Soundarya Institute of Management and Science, Soundaryanagar, Sidedahalli,
Nagasandra Post, Bangalore

Abstract

A consortium is a collaboration of groups that combine to bring together resources, exchange knowledge, and cooperate on initiatives focused on common interests. Consortia have shown their effectiveness as a dominant mechanism for stimulating innovation, improving information accessibility, and optimizing resource allocation on a global scale. An important factor in India's development as a worldwide research powerhouse has been the emergence of consortia, which have significantly transformed the academic and research environment in the nation.

This paper explores the significance of consortia in influencing research and innovation, with a specific emphasis on the Indian and worldwide settings. In addition, the chapter will present prominent examples of successful consortia in India and globally, and analyze their impact on research, education, and technological advancement.

Keywords: Digital Library, E-Resources, Library Consortia, Research, University Grants Commission

Introduction

Information is essential for learning and teaching, and there is a lot of it out there now. Information technology innovations have improved information organization and availability. The increase in data has had a significant impact on libraries and information centers, posing challenges for librarians and information providers in collecting, processing, and distributing vast quantities of information.

Today libraries face challenges with a rising demand for services is also accompanied by challenges related to the substantial expansion in information resource management, escalating

costs of library items, high user expectations, budget reductions, and other related concerns. A viable approach to address these challenges is to create a library consortium, particularly focused on the procurement of electronic contents (Nazir, 2018).

A library consortium is a collaboration among libraries to engage in resource sharing that has emerged as a result of information expansion, advancements in computer technology, and financial limitations. By leveraging ICT improvements, scientific journal publishers have transitioned from traditional interlibrary loan and resource sharing methods to producing electronic versions of printed journals. This evolution has resulted in increased convenience, portability, and cost-effectiveness (Uplaonkar and Badiger, 2017).

Library Consortia

When referring to the acquisition of electronic resources, the term "consortia" refers to a cooperative arrangement between a set of organizations. As a result of this agreement, they are able to combine their purchasing power and take advantage of their superior negotiation ability in order to get the most significant price reduction regarding electronic journals. The term "library consortium" refers to a collaborative agreement amongst libraries that are affiliated with comparable institutions about specific needs in order to perform their operations in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

In accordance with Huarng and Yu (2011), a library consortium is defined as the organization of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among libraries with the intention of sharing information resources. The consortium, consisting of the libraries, offers numerous advantages. It would be beneficial to encourage cooperation among its member libraries in areas such as information sharing, inter-library lending, and the purchase of electronic databases. Achieving a fair distribution of library financing would be advantageous because it would allow even the smallest libraries to make excellent use of the resources, they have available. The Consortium provides a highly effective information infrastructure to libraries that are members.

Evolution of Consortia

During the last decade of the 1960s, the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC) and the Birmingham Libraries Co-operative Mechanization Project (BLCMP) came together to establish a library consortium with the purpose of facilitating the sharing of resources across various libraries. There has been a broad acceptance of library consortiums on both the national and international levels as

a consequence of the increased participation of academic libraries in collaborative activities, which include the pooling of resources with a common goal.

The implementation of computer systems in libraries in Western countries began between 1980 and 1990, marking the beginning of the process of digital library automation and information dissemination. It was in the 1990s that the digital era began, with the introduction of online publications and the increasing participation of library consortia, with the OCLC being the most notable of these consortia.

From the 2000s to the present, grassroots communities have led the focus on digital licensing, shared storage solutions, and the development of open-access resources. Through the use of their collective bargaining power, consortiums were able to negotiate more advantageous terms for electronic resources.

Features of Library Consortia

Following features of library consortia explained by Singh & Rao, in their article:

- Encouraging collaborative research and development in the use of ICT improves service quality and achieves cost efficiency.
- It establishes the ability for organizations and institutions to collaborate on their resources while maintaining the uniqueness of each member library.
- It is possible to achieve cost-effective interlibrary search expansion.
- Personnel should grow professionally and engage to ensure high-quality service.
- Prioritizing access to new electronic resources, such as databases and services accessible via the internet and websites, enhances the library services.
- The collaborative effort aims to reduce the expenses associated with purchasing consortia. Hence, end users may avail themselves of a greater range of materials compared to what would be accessible via a single library.
- The collections held by the Consortium libraries facilitate the provision of academic research assistance to the users of each member library.
- We approach the management of uncertainties in legal matters with more assurance.

Consortia Models.

Member libraries collaborate, share resources, and make decisions in consortiums. Diverse types of consortiums serve diverse requirements, objectives, and resources. Explore the various models that define library consortiums.

- **Centrally Funded Model:** A central funding agency or parent organization manages consortium finances under the centralized financed model. Centralized financing supports these consortiums' operations and objectives. UGC's INFONET, ICMR's CSIR, and DSIR's CSIR are examples.
- **Closed Group Consortia:** Libraries with comparable requirements create closed consortia. These consortia have simpler rules and administration. Libraries with similar interests exchange resources and expertise. Example: CSIR, DAE, IIM Consortium.
- **National Consortium:** National consortia are cooperative associations that function on a nationwide scale, uniting organizations from around the country to accomplish shared objectives. Example: UGC INFONET, INDEST-AICTE.
- **Open Consortia:** Open consortia allow libraries to join or leave at any time, using an inclusive approach. Many publishers need a minimum number of libraries to pay a certain amount per title. This flexible architecture allows libraries with different resource needs. Example: INDEST Consortium.
- **Publisher Initiatives:** Partnerships create publisher consortia. National consortia negotiate substantial discount consortium pricing for libraries. This concept uses the consortium's combined negotiating power to provide libraries a broad choice of resources at lower prices. SCIENCE DIRECT and EMERALD are publisher-initiated consortia.
- **Shared-budget Model:** The shared budget concept distributes cash evenly across consortium members. Each library contributes to the consortium budget and manages finances separately. This methodology guarantees financial transparency and library donations meet demand.

2.4 Concept and Importance of Consortia

A consortium operates on the premise that collaborations improve outcomes. Through the consolidation of resources and specialized knowledge, the group gains increased strength and enhanced ability to tackle complicated challenges. Within the academic and research sphere,

consortia include universities, research institutes, libraries, government organizations, and even firms of a private kind. These partnerships assist in the purchase of a larger selection of tools, technology, and expertise, therefore fostering a multidisciplinary approach that is essential for significant scientific advancements.

For research institutions, consortiums allow for:

- **Shared Resources:** Many smaller universities, especially, lack the financial means to access costly research tools, databases, and publications. Consortia allow for resource consolidation, reducing budgetary constraints.
- **Collaboration Across Borders:** By overcoming geographical limitations, research consortia facilitate the smooth collaboration of scholars from many regions of the world. This is particularly crucial when it comes to tackling worldwide issues like climate change, epidemics, and equitable development.
- **Accelerated Innovation:** Consortia, by integrating several areas of specific knowledge, provide a rich environment for fostering creativity. Sometimes, complex issues require transdisciplinary methodologies, which a collaborative environment more readily enables.

Library Consortium's Role in Resource Sharing

Library consortia are not just purchasing groups, but rather platforms for the exchange of highly valued materials across many libraries throughout the country. Furthermore, these consortia have the capacity to engage in additional activities that are mutually advantageous. Libraries have a limited capacity to store or acquire all the necessary information. Library collaboration, which was originally limited to inter-library loans, document distribution, and library networks, has now expanded to include library consortia. The consortium facilitates the integration of libraries into a highly efficient network of collaborative organizations that effectively serve patrons. Each individual library is responsible for transmitting their holdings to other libraries under a resource sharing program. The primary goal is to improve libraries' ability to efficiently serve their patrons through interlibrary collaboration. The consortia are expansive networks including both digital and non-digital resources and services.

ICT applications enhance the efficiency, speed, accessibility, correctness, content review, and transparency of information dissemination across research communities, libraries, information centers, and other organizations. The Consortium encourages member libraries and their users to

participate in a dynamic environment characterized by rapid and significant changes. The consortium's main goal is to facilitate resource exchange and provide access to essential e-resource packages at a reasonable cost, thereby improving education quality.

The Consortium aims to revolutionize the collection and service structure of libraries by transitioning from print to non-print formats and from manual to automated technologies. E-libraries have the potential to revolutionize user services by providing access to information, empowering users and facilitating their participation in the contemporary academic research community. This, in turn, supports the conduct of superior research and helps prevent the duplication of research efforts.

Impact of Consortia on Research and Innovation

- **Enhanced Access to Resources:** Consortia facilitate the consolidation of resources across member libraries, therefore granting scholars an expanded portfolio of materials including journals, databases, and e-books. In order to conduct thorough literature evaluations and remain up-to-date with the most recent advancements in many disciplines, increased access is essential.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Consortia can negotiate collective licenses and subscriptions to reduce the cost of purchasing resources. This cost-sharing strategy enables libraries to efficiently access excellent resources that would otherwise be financially unattainable, facilitating more comprehensive research endeavors.
- **Collaborative Research Opportunities:** Consortia enable cross-institutional cooperation among researchers. The availability of shared platforms and resources facilitates collaborative research initiatives, data sharing, and co-authorship of articles, resulting in novel results and progress in many fields.
- **Interlibrary Loan Services:** Typically, consortia provide comprehensive interlibrary loan services, enabling scholars to borrow resources from libraries that are part of the consortium. This service is extremely useful for obtaining scarce or specialized materials that are not available in the local area.
- **Professional Development and Training:** Frequently, consortia provide conferences, seminars, and training programs specifically designed for library personnel and scholars. These events facilitate the maintenance of participants' knowledge on the most recent tools, technologies, and optimal methods, therefore promoting a culture of ongoing learning and innovation.

- **Digital Preservation and Access:** Consortia have a key role in digital preservation endeavors because they ensure the preservation and accessibility of essential research resources for future generations. Initiatives such as Hathi Trust demonstrate how consortia may spearhead extensive digitization and preservation endeavors.

- **Innovation in Library Services:** By working together, consortia can pilot and implement innovative library services and technologies. This collaborative approach allows for the sharing of best practices and the development of new solutions that can be adopted by all member libraries.

Consortium Initiatives in India

- **FORSA (Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy and Astrophysics)**

The FORSA is an informal alliance of Indian institutions dedicated to the fields of astronomy and astrophysics. The Raman Research Institute in Bangalore founded this organization on July 29, 1981. The FORSA consortium has five members who collaborated to initiate negotiations for licensing astronomical publications and choose a subscription agency as the journal provider. We directly pay the respective provider for subscriptions in both print and electronic formats. Initially, a specific publisher's astronomical publications were the sole focus of the arrangement. Nevertheless, the consortium members now collectively bear the cost of the license to provide electronic access to the journal Nature.

- **IIM Libraries Consortium**

The IIM Librarians' goal of actively seeking opportunities for resource sharing gave rise to the IIM Libraries consortium. In addition to promoting interlibrary lending practices, IIM Libraries also prioritized resource sharing in many key areas, including cooperative acquisition, cooperative processing, and dispersed consumption. Since its inception in 2000, the IIM Libraries collaboration has been effectively thriving with several new projects.

- **INDEST-AICTE Consortium**

The INDEST-AICTE Consortium was formed in 2003 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) with the intention of providing engineering and technical institutions in India with reduced access to electronic resources. Since 2012, the Consortium has welcomed 102 universities/institutions under its self-supported category, and the AICTE has financially assisted 60 government/government-aided engineering schools to access certain electronic resources. The Consortium now has a total of 1235 members.

- **HELINET (Health Sciences Library and Information Network)**

The Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences (RGUHS) in Karnataka, India established the innovative digital library project HELINET. Established in 2002, HELINET's objective is to improve the standard of teaching and research in health sciences by providing access to a wide range of digital resources. HELINET provides access to more than 600 major worldwide electronic journals, over 2,000 electronic books, over 1,500 films, and a range of research databases. With its network of over 660 health sciences institutions in Karnataka, it offers resources to students, staff, and researchers.

- **UGC-INFONET**

A consortium called the UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium was established by the University Grants Commission (UGC) with the purpose of providing Indian academics with access to scholarly electronic literature. In 2004, the UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium was established with the purpose of bridging the digital divide by supplying educational institutions with electronic materials of superior quality. The intellectual content that was offered to a large number of students, researchers, and professors came from over 200 different universities and institutions. In the year 2015, the UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium merged with e-Shod Sindhu to form a new organization that offers a service that is comparable.

- **N-LIST (National Library and Information Services Infrastructure for Scholarly Content)**

The N-LIST project is a joint effort of the e-Shod Sindhu Consortium, the INFLIBNET Centre, and the INDEST-AICTE Consortium, which is located at the Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi. With the help of a cutting-edge access mechanism, the N-LIST provides all colleges, whether they receive government assistance or not, with access to 97,333 electronic books and 6,328 electronic periodicals. The N-LIST initiative makes electronic resources available for a variety of collegiate subjects, including the arts, humanities, physical and chemical sciences, life sciences, computer science, political science, library and information science, law, business, mathematics, and statistics.

- **e-Shod Sindhu**

The e-Shod Sindhu system was established by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, which is now known as the Ministry of Education. An Expert Committee suggested incorporating

the UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium, NLIST, and INDEST-AICTE Consortium to accomplish this. The e-Shod Sindhu will continue to offer current and archival access to more than 10,000 core and peer-reviewed journals, as well as a variety of bibliographic, citation, and factual databases in a variety of fields. Its member institutions, which include centrally funded technical institutions, universities, and colleges under the UGC's 12(B) and 2(f) provisions, have access to these databases from a large number of publishers and aggregators.

Consortia Initiatives: International

- **CARLI (Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois)**

The CARLI is a membership-based organization that promotes libraries dedicated to academic and research activities in the state of Illinois. The CARLI consortium offers a variety of services, including as pooled resources, digital collections, and training programs, to augment the capacities of its member libraries. CARLI's services include more than 125 member institutions, providing benefits to about 90% of Illinois' higher education students, teachers, and staff. Their endeavors include the I-Share integrated library system, licensing of electronic resources, and provision of physical delivery services across the whole state.

- **CONCERT (Consortium on Core Electronic Resources in Taiwan)**

Established in 1998, the Consortium on Core Electronic Resources in Taiwan (CONCERT) is a formal nonprofit organization. The Science and Technology Policy Research and Information Center (STPI) oversees the organization's management. CONCERT has over 200 members, mostly consisting of colleges, universities, and research/government institutions.

In January 2023, CONCERT and Elsevier entered into a deal to facilitate open access publication for writers from Taiwan while ensuring that Elsevier's material, available on ScienceDirect, remains accessible.

- **SANLIC (South African National Library and Information Consortium)**

EIFL helped bring about the establishment of the SANLIC in 2001. The consortium grants licenses for electronic resources to libraries in higher education and national research institutes in South Africa. Between 2004 and 2015, EIFL, in collaboration with SANLIC, facilitated access to a

diverse array of academic electronic resources. Public libraries in South Africa further derived advantages from EIFL initiatives pertaining to free access, copyright, and innovation.

- **CURL (Consortium of University Research Libraries)**

Research Libraries UK (RLUK) is the current official name of the Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL), which comprises prominent research libraries in the United Kingdom and Ireland. In 1983, the seven major university research libraries founded the Consortium as an informal consortium to foster greater collaboration, particularly in the field of automation.

The CURL in the UK has a total of 28 member libraries, including 22 university libraries as well as the British Library, National Library of Wales, and National Library of Scotland. RLUK's goal is to influence the research library agenda and enhance the broader knowledge economy by pioneering programs and services that support the research process.

- **ICOLC (International Coalition Library Consortia)**

Over two hundred library consortia from nations all over the globe are members of the ICOLC, which is a non-formal organization. The Consortium of Consortia (COC) preceded the establishment of ICOLC in 1997. Its purpose is to provide its members with the opportunity to participate in strategic and practical discussions about issues that mutually interest them.

Library Consortia: Advantages

- Collaboration across multiple libraries.
- Electronic archives are extensive.
- Enhance the provision of professional services to users and establish a benchmark of professional conduct among the specialists in the field.
- Minimize the duplication of core collections, particularly for core journals.
- Reduce the cost of information.
- The creation of a shared resources database facilitates convenient access to resource sharing on the internet.
- Time-saving.
- This system allows the sharing and archiving of resources.

Issues and Challenges

- Accounting concerns.
- Archiving concerns.

- Continuity and long-term Management of access.
- Electronic resource identification.
- Electronic resources pricing.
- Evaluation of use and usability.
- Licensing challenges.
- Negotiations.
- Subscription based on printing.

Conclusion

Consortia have significant efficacy in stimulating research and fostering innovation. Consortia facilitates cooperation, resource sharing, and the dismantling of barriers across disciplines and institutions, empowering researchers to tackle intricate global issues. In India, consortia have been instrumental in strengthening the country's research capacities and facilitating the integration of Indian scholars into the international scientific community. Consortia have fundamentally transformed the process of knowledge generation and dissemination on a global scale, making them essential for the future of research and innovation. When considering the future, consortia will persist as a significant influence in determining the trajectory of scientific exploration and technical progress.

References:

1. Birdie, C., & Alladi, V. (2003). The future of consortia among Indian libraries—FORSA consortium as forerunner? In *Library and Information Services in Astronomy, IV (LISA IV)*, (165).
2. CARLI. (n.d.). Retrieved August 18, 2024, <https://www.carli.illinois.edu/about>
3. Cheung, M. (2024, August 28). *Home - Research Libraries UK*. Research Libraries UK. <https://www.rluk.ac.uk/>
4. CONCERT. (n.d.). Retrieved August 8, 2024, <https://concert.stpi.narl.org.tw/abouteng>
5. Consortium on Core Electronic Resources in Taiwan. (2021, September 26). ICOLC website. <https://icolc.net/participating-consortia/consortium-core-electronic-resources-taiwan>
6. Dhule, S. (2019). Use of N-LIST in Government Law College, Mumbai: A case study. *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field*, 5(1), 132–134.

7. EIFL. (n.d.). Retrieved August 28, 2024, <https://eifl.net/country/south-africa>
8. Gandhinagar, I. C. (n.d.). *From INFLIBNET Centre Gandhinagar*. Retrieved August 10, 2024, <https://inflibnet.ac.in/>
9. *ICOLC Website*. (2024, March 22). Retrieved August 18, 2024, <https://icolc.net/>
10. IIM Libraries Consortium, & IIM Consortium. (n.d.). Retrieved August 13, 2024, <https://www.iimlibrariesconsortium.in/>
11. Mukwambo, P. (2016). *Quality as human development: A case study of teaching and learning in Zimbabwean universities* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).
12. Muthuraj, A., & Rajkumar, T. (2018). UGC INFONET digital library consortium-an overview. *Future libraries: Issues and challenges*.
13. Nazir, T. (2018). Special library consortia: A resource sharing approach in an electronic milieu. In I. R. Management Association (Ed.), *Library science and administration: Concepts, methodologies, tools, and applications* (pp. 1579–1604). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-3914-8.ch074>
14. RGUHS University. (n.d.). Library. <http://www.rguhs.ac.in/digitallibrary/Helinet%20about%20us.html>
15. Uplaonkar, S. S., & Badiger, M. K. G. (2017). Library consortia: An overview. *International Journal of Library and Information Studies*, 7(2), 132–139.

Received on Oct 30, 2024

Accepted on Dec 17, 2024

Published on Jan 01, 2025

Power in Partnership: The Role of Consortia in Shaping Research and Innovation © 2025 by Srikanth H.G. is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0