

## Consortial access of scholarly e-resources on S&T in India

One of the major constraints of research in science and technology in India is the lack of quick and convenient access to latest information. In the beginning of the 21st century, the emergence of a number of national and regional e-resources consortia in India constitutes the most prominent development in promoting better, faster and more cost effective ways of providing broad access to scholarly e-resources. Due to collective bargaining by the above consortia with publishers and aggregators, it has been possible to reduce the access charge of e-resources for Indian institutions. Now the question is, whether this apparent successful situation – the bulk purchase of access rights of a huge collection of e-resources in lieu of few core printed journals at reduced rate is really beneficial for users of a library.

The effectiveness of a library solely depends on the actual use of its resources rather than the richness of its collection. Librarians are well aware that the all-inclusive nature of the present consortial deals mean that low impact, low-usage and even unused journals are automatically included in their collections, with little funding left over to finance niche titles from other sources. Urbano *et al.*<sup>1</sup> analysed the use of e-journals accessed through consortia mode of subscription and compared the dimension of the consortial gain of the libraries against commercial gain of the publishers. According to their view, two basic problems arise in respect of usage statistics for the above purpose. First, the lack of standardization in the process of the collection of usage data and second, the difficulty in determining the value of a particular title according to its use. The different publishers and aggregators do not follow uniform practices such as format and period in collecting usage data of e-

resources, making it difficult for libraries to make comparisons and to conduct information audits. It is widely agreed by publishers and librarians that recording and exchange of online usage data of e-resources should be done in a more consistent way. Initiatives such as the Counter project<sup>2</sup>, that brings together librarians and publishers, must put all usage data in an internationally agreed code of practice such as ‘Counter compliant data’, thus enormously hindering the real use of the data. Borrego and Urbano<sup>3</sup> analysed the usage data of a package of 31 e-journals, used by 52 IP addresses in 2003 at the University of Barcelona, Spain. The result shows that a minority of users consume a great amount of information, and most of the users make little use of the titles of e-journals. Consumption of abstracts may be taken as a good indicator of the number of regular users of a particular e-journal.

In India no comprehensive study on ‘the behaviour of users in the use of e-resources’ has been undertaken till now. The result of this type of study is essential for assessing the benefits obtained from the huge investment of libraries in accessing e-resources and ascertaining successful consortial deals. The usage statistics of e-resources will in turn lead to new ways of measuring value and identifying price points. In my opinion, a consortial acquisition deal should have the feature that is no longer solely based on ‘all-or-nothing’ model but on measurable and relevant levels of actual use by each of the libraries of the consortium. Rather than allocating the majority of the library budget to the bundled collections of pre-selected titles, it is likely that libraries will be attracted to a new type of consortial deal that offer core collections of high impact journals with an op-

tion to access comparatively low impact journals on occasional choice basis. On the price front, the access charge will have two components – the first portion will be treated as fixed charge for accessing the core collection and to be paid in advance at the beginning of the year. The remaining portion is at varying rate of access charge which will be levied according to the relevant levels of actual use by a particular library and to be settled at the end of the year. Every library of the consortium will have to pay the fixed charge at an equal rate but each of them will have the right to choose titles of the journals according to their individual subject interest maintaining a fixed upper limit of core journals. This ‘first-use-then-pay’ model will be a sustainable consortial deal as the proposed arrangement is sound both in economy and in usefulness.

The model described above may require minor modifications and a suggestion for improvement of the same is welcome. But if we do not act now for a better model, then the benefit of consortial deal will be restricted only to access of some additional (mostly low impact) journals.

1. Urbano, C., Anglada, L., Borrego, A., Cantos, C., Cosculluela, A. and Comellas, N., *D-Lib. Mag.*, 2004, **10**; <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/june04/anglada/06anglada.htm>
2. <http://www.projectcounter.org>
3. Borrego, A. and Urbano, C., *J. Docum.*, 2007, **63**, 243–258.

HARI PRASAD SHARMA

*Bengal Engineering and Science  
University,  
Shibpur,  
Howrah 711 103, India  
e-mail: sharma\_hp@hotmail.com*