Networking Libraries for Resource Sharing: Problems and Prospects

By
Dr. Sanghamitra Pradhan

Introduction

With the exponential growth and increasing cost of information resources, it has become impracticable for any library, howsoever large or financially rich, to be self-sufficient to gratify the needs of its users. Therefore the need for sharing resources is being increasingly felt among the libraries of today.

Concept of resource sharing has transformed due to

- Advanced application of information technology
- Availability of resources in various formats, and above all
- Willingness among the libraries to share with others

Status of Library Networking

The urge for resource sharing has always existed in libraries. Libraries are compelling to think of resource sharing through networking because of

- short of budget and resources
- ever increasing published information
- users' diversified information needs
- inflationary price of documents, both print and non-print

Resource sharing is aggressively happening in many forms; the traditional form of interlibrary lending to local networking for

- cooperative acquisition
- collection development
- shared cataloguing
- centralized processing
- sharing of bibliographical data

- lack of storage facility
- centralized periodicals collection
- exchange of content page of journals
- obtaining photocopies of articles
- exchange of electronic documents and articles
- electronic document delivery
- sharing subscribed databases
- e-journal consortium, etc.

Boost from Technology

- Remote transmission of texts, graphics, video and animated clips are being made possible over library networks

- Discovery of library materials by users of different libraries is made more possible by shared catalogues and initiatives like Google Scholar

- Increased use of RSS feeds and metadata harvesting tools and likely to move more materials between libraries in future

Status in India

- National networks such as INFLIBNET and DELNET
- Sectoral networks like BTISNET, ENVIS, FOSTIS, etc.
- A number of metropolitan library networks   like CALIBNET, BONET, ADINET,   MYLIBNET

Library networks mostly assist to

- Build databases that are collaboratively and dynamically maintained in different subject fields
- Help libraries to build up IT infrastructure and
- Train staff for effective participation in networking venture

Problems and prospects of networking libraries for resource sharing

- Most of the libraries in India and even many in developed countries are facing unprecedented crucial resource building problems

- Substantial gap in resource sharing among libraries caused due to digital divide

- Extent of Internet and networked information provision is minimal in public libraries and also in academic libraries at present

Areas where the libraries face problems

- IT and networking infrastructure
- Database development
- Standardization
- Agreement among participants
- Willingness for Co-operation
- Incentives
- Skills for networking

IT and networking infrastructure

Availability of facilities like adequate computers, Internet and E mail in libraries are very important requirements for electronic access and retrieval of information sources.

➢ **Problems**

- Libraries are yet to explore the full potentialities of IT and internet technologies.

- Many libraries do not have computers to start with

- Many especially public and academic libraries severely lack hardware, software and other infrastructural facilities

➤ **Prospects**

- Availability of facilities like Internet and E mail in libraries for electronic access and retrieval of information sources.

- Provision of adequate resources from government and other funding agencies

- Development of subsidized integrated library management systems

- Availability of open source software

• **Database development**

Effective information sharing greatly depends on indigenously developed databases

➢ **Problems**

- Development of databases of the library's collection along with bibliographical tools effort requires massive preparation at individual libraries' end.

- Most libraries do not have staff with requisite expertise to develop databases.

- Availability of fund for creating database is a major impediment

➢Prospects

- Participating libraries have to work out a strategic plan for successful development of databases

- Hiring of external services or outsourcing is a good option although there is risk of poor deliverance of work which can be taken care of by strict quality control measures

- Management should lend financial, technical and moral support to the library

• **Standardization**

To serve the users of all participating libraries on common platform standardization in service provision is very crucial

➤ **Problems**

- Libraries often independently build their digital system or the databases of their holdings by applying a variety of software for input

- Once it is created fully or partially libraries are reluctant to change owing to cost factor

- Non adherence to standardized processes creates problem in sharing resources in terms of electronic access, retrieval and delivery over the network

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Prospects

•Initiatives for interoperability among the library systems in a network even if such systems are evolved independently yet be able to call on one another efficiently and conveniently

•Standard format like MARC format, ACCR-II cataloguing code, a standard thesaurus like LCSH uniformly in developing catalogue

•Resource sharing model of the network should use distributed search interface Z39.50 protocol which translates the member libraries' query into an appropriate query for each of the constituent databases. This ensures effective online sharing and exchange of catalogue data and even full text.

• **Agreement among participants**

A network works if it is based on fulfillment of mutual objectives of partnering libraries.

➢ **Problems**

- Many a time small libraries show inhibition to take part in joint venture as they become apprehensive of equal treatment in exchanging resources.

- Lack of understanding of network's objectives and combine that with those of the other partners

Prospects

- Signing a common memorandum of agreement by all participating libraries at the institutional level
- Compiling a set of rules of 'do' and don't' for all stakeholders for mutual support and exchange of information.
- All problems and decision whenever possible must be jointly owned and resolved by all the partners as a team.
- Shared vision, trust, openness and commitment among partners are necessary ingredients for any network.

• **Willingness for Co-operation**

Networking is a cooperative and collaborative effort of a diverse group

➢**Problems**

- Libraries lack co-operation among themselves for information exchange

- Library managers hesitate to interact with other organizations

- Reluctant to share resources and are not comfortable to give electronic access to their local collection

- Many see the local holdings as a source of power, as advantage over others and try to monopolize

➢ **Prospects**

- Continued effort should be made to convince libraries that cornering and hoarding of resources from a large group of potential and needy information seekers is an unfair act

- Deliberation in various platforms in this issue

- Coordinate library networking efforts and plan to include more partners to enrich resource base for sharing

• **Incentives**

A network survives if all partnering libraries perceive cost effectiveness and continue to receive worthwhile benefits from the arrangement. Energies of all will be noticeable when there is a win-win approach for all prevails.

➢ **Problems**

- Collections of large libraries tend to be overused in a network such libraries would be unwilling to part their resources with small libraries unless there are enough compensating incentives

➢ **Prospects**

- Incentives can be in terms of enhanced network visibility of libraries
- Advertising their participation and encouraging library users to make use of the networked services
- Promoting libraries to project an image to the outside world
- Adopting a system of credits and debits. By this a credit point is earned by libraries by lending a resource and a debit point by borrowing one. At regular intervals these points may be settled in monetary or other acceptable terms as per network guidelines.

- **Skills for Networking**

Upgrading the skills of the librarians who implement, manage and support the immense variety of constantly developing services at regular interval is very essential

Librarians have to be conversant with network hardware and software technology and must have expertise for database creation, digitization, content development, website design, etc.

➢ **Problems**

- Lack of competent staff is a common state of affairs in libraries of all types

- Training in ICT is not adequately and regularly organized and yet to cover all concerned staff

➢ **Prospects**

- INFLIBNET's SOUL training programme, PLANNER & ILMS training programme to train in library automation and networking technologies

- Apart from technological expertise the modern library professionals should have

  - Interpersonal skills,

  - Marketing,

  - Promotion,

  - Internet usage and net navigation skills

  - Adequate knowledge about legal issues like copyright in electronic environment

Conclusion

- Indian libraries especially in Gujarat reveals libraries are slowly but steadily gearing up for resource sharing ventures and have benefited as both users and suppliers of networking services.

- There are still a huge number, mostly school and public libraries, deprived of basic necessity of universal access to information to local users as these are facing lots of problems in terms of lack of fund, non-cooperation, lack of requisite skill, etc.

- Initiatives from libraries, library networks, parental institutions, government agencies, publishing industry, etc. should be made to resolve issues and enable libraries to connect to a wider world

On a positive note one can say that prospects of resource sharing through networking seem to be encouraging owing to several emerging factors such as:

- reduced cost of IT application;
- increased effort of various library organisations and networks in extending support to establish IT infrastructure and training to staff to handle networking,
- government's initiative to build national knowledge consortium to bridge the gap of information access inequality for all,
- realization of libraries in getting benefit through mutual sharing,
- entry of young, dynamic and skilled manpower into library profession, etc.

Thank You