

SWOT ANALYSIS OF CONSORTIA IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Shilpa Rani N. R.*, Lalitha Aswath**

Abstract *Revolution in information production is influencing libraries to come up with new ideas to provide effective information services to users in best possible way. Though there are many constraints like economic issues, policy matters etc., but constant growth of users' information thirst demands for solution. And continued efforts in the direction led to the concept of consortia initiatives as a means to meet users' information requirements by sharing of information resources among libraries. Electronic publishing is the key factor in formation, promotion and development of consortium. SWOT analysis is helpful in addressing the financial, managerial and policy aspects of consortium as well as user perspective towards e-resources. Here an attempt has been made to throw light on the growth and development of library consortium, role of e-publishing in consortia and more importantly analysis of library consortia by using SWOT analysis technique to find out strengths, weakness, opportunities and solutions to the threats in adapting to consortia.*

Keyword: Consortium, E-publishing, Information Technology, SWOT, Print Publishing

PROLOGUE

Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threat (SWOT) is a strategic management technique which is being used to analyze the policy, management, and activities of a product, a service and an organization to improve upon the quality through strategic planning. SWOT analysis provides solutions to many problems in an organization. Purpose of performing SWOT analysis in consortia management is to address problems and to reveal positive forces to solve those problems with strategic planning and decision.

It is a known fact that libraries are never self sufficient establishments and always depend on parent organization for funding. Hence, financial factors are of vital importance to think over and to join hands to share resources may be among participating members under defined terms and conditions.

EMERGENCE OF ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING

Technology has become the life blood of modern society. Life has become very rapid and easy with the use of new technologies in all sectors. An education/academic sector has changed tremendously with the emergence of electronic media. With the advent of new technologies in publishing industry, printed materials are being replaced gradually by electronic versions.

Invention of printing machine by Johannes Gutenberg is a major stepping stone in the publishing world. Later, evolution of user friendly computers, emergence of new technologies - CDRoms, fiber optics, multimedia, World Wide Web and communication networks etc. have brought about a major revolution in publishing industry. Electronic documents can be produced, edited and disseminated worldwide without barriers. Electronic version of information is created and distributed in different formats which are easy to print also. In early stages of e-publishing many journals and books were combination of both print and electronic version. When users started feeling comfortable and ease in use and access to e-version 24/7 from anywhere, any time and in any format, e-publishing industry started booming swiftly. Many libraries started to switch to e-versions of information materials only. Gradually concentration on print collection declined to some extent. When compared to print, information on electronic media is very easy to search, retrieve, download and disseminate. So, libraries, publishers and distributors started thinking in new ways to reach users with new collaborations and networks. As a result of this collaboration consortia became the vital part of academic sector and electronic publishing gained the economic importance.

ROLE OF ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING IN CONSORTIA

Electronic publishing is a key cause to the development of consortium. E-publishing revolutionized and changed

* Assistant Professor, DOS in Library & Information Science, Karnataka State Open University, Mysore, Karnataka, India.
Email: shilparani.nr@gmail.com

** Professor, DOS in Library & Information Science, Bangalore University, Bangalore, Karnataka, India.
Email: aswathlalitha@yahoo.com

the way of thinking, talking and transactions of academic community. E-publishing is one of the latest developments in the publishing industry which could be broadly understood as a computer based/ web based online interactive materials provided by publishers. It includes e-journals, e-books, online databases, ETDs, e-reference sources etc. electronic resources are user friendly, very flexible in nature and no time/geographical barrier to access. Reduced storage cost with single interface and multiple access points.

Easy and quick sharing of e-resources among consortia members made possible only because of electronic publishing. Conveying of newly published information to users is very easy. Provisions are available to request for required articles or any sort of information. Along with that users will get alerts to their inbox about selected subjects as and when new information is generated.

CONSORTIUM STATUS DURING PRINT PUBLISHING AND ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING

Print publishing	Electronic publishing
During traditional publishing - sharing of resources was (printed form such as books, journals, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers etc.) done through postal system or by person.	Creation, distribution and sharing of digital content through a variety of electronic media i.e. web, CD ROM, Disk , tape etc.
Printing and publishing cost was very high.	Printing and Publishing costs are comparatively low.
Journals and books were very expensive in nature. Hence, very limited copies were available to share. It was very hard to provide timely information to the users due to delayed transit.	Users will get new updates quickly on their desktops and same information will be used by multiple users 24/7 without any geographical restriction.
Communication among members was very slow	Members are not required to wait for any messenger. Communication among consortia members is very speedy through advanced electronic media.
Too much time being consumed and lots of storage space used in libraries	Unlimited storage on internet has solved the problem of storage space in the libraries

Academic librarians are always affected by financial constraints to buy resources to the library on the bases of their clients demand. Electronic publishing has created new opportunities for libraries to switch over to new purchasing practices. Library consortium has become the life blood to the libraries in terms of instant access, collection development and collaborative growth.

Major e-resources used in academic libraries are;

- E-journals
- E-books
- E-reference materials
- Bibliographic databases
- Full-text databases
- Statistical databases
- ETDs...etc.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONSORTIUM

According to available literature there is no particular date to mention for the genesis of the concept of consortia. Generally concept has been viewed as a collaboration / association / partnership of professionals. The concept is not a current one, but history has shown many instances where libraries have come together voluntarily to help each other like any other cooperatives. It could be viewed as the beginning of cooperative efforts in librarianship. Later, computerized networks come into existence, for sharing of resources. Till then, library resources shared were in traditional print format. The computerized networks so created, build their bibliographical databases, so that the users of participating libraries are able to get the required documents from other libraries through document delivery services. In the light of e-resources development, the concept of consortia has been confined mainly to the subscription of e-journals.

Libraries in general and Academic libraries in particular established consortia with an intension of sharing the

available resources, holdings of books and journals of participating libraries. Literature in the field of librarianship shows that there were resource sharing attempts, but as consortia doesn't have long history. New types of library cooperative activities began in 1990's to exploit the advances in information technology. OCLC is one such major example at the global level. Over the years many new consortia initiatives such as; Colorado's CARL, Georgia's GALILEO, Illinois's IDAL, Maryland's SAILOR, Missouri's MIRACAL, NEW Zealand's CONZUL, CAUL, MetroNet, North America's CRL, North Carolina's embryonic NCLive, Ohio's OhioLink, Pennsylvania's PALCI, Portland's PORTALS, Texas's TexShare, Virginia's VIVA, Washington's WRLC, CIC in South Asia, CURL in UK, CALIM in Manchester, Concord in British, metroweb in Network,...etc. came into operation at the international level¹. In India, major initiatives in this regard are NKRC, INDEST, UGC-INFONET, NLIST program, CeRA consortia, etc.

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES AND E-RESOURCES

Technology has impacted on every walk of human life, libraries are no exceptions. Every activity in the library has been influenced by IT. Information explosion, growing needs of users and increasing price of information in electronic environment has created newer business opportunities to publishers, intermediaries and scholarly societies. On the other hand academic libraries are rethinking of their individual traditional subscription of print material to e-material. In such a situation, an effort has been made to understand the significance of consortia role in e-resource building in academic libraries. In the absence of consortium in academic environment the libraries:

- May fail to provide right information to the right user at the right time.
- Libraries may have to depend more on Institutional membership, Inter Library Loan & Document delivery Services to full-fill the needs of users.
- May have to cancel some journals every year due to continuous rise in prices of information coupled with inadequate funding/budget of institutions.
- Are forced to join hands for sharing of information due to advancement of multidisciplinary subjects and drastic increase in information seekers and their demands.
- Growth in technology is forcing libraries to shift towards e-environment.

¹ www.wikipedia.org

HISTORY OF SWOT ANALYSIS

Albert Humphrey developed an analytical tool while working on a research project at Stanford University to evaluate the strategic plans and find out the reasons for failure of corporate plans and named the tool as SOFT analysis where:

- **S** was meant for Satisfactory at present,
- **O** for Opportunities in future,
- **F** for Faults at present and
- **T** for Threats in future.

Most people agreed that SOFT analysis proceeded in to SWOT analysis, but some argue that the concept of SWOT analysis has nothing to do with SOFT and it is a separate concept altogether.

In 1964, there was a seminar at Zurich on Long Range Planning, in which the term SWOT was introduced for the first time by Urick and Orr with slight modifications. Modifications were the replacement of F for faults to W for Weaknesses. With this initial promotion in Britain, the concept soon gained momentum among strategic planners and management consultants' world over.

The current expression of SWOT is that:

S represents the Strength – an advantageous edge over the other similar business situations.

W for Weaknesses i.e. disadvantages over other similar business situations.

O represents Opportunities – possibilities that could be explored to boost the business's growth

T for Threats – the factors - (both external and/or environmental factors) which could create problems for the business.²

SWOT analysis is one of the techniques available to evaluate any system to understand and to promote for. In libraries scenario, consortium is blooming as inevitable means to access e-resources by opting for fair pricing model. Thus, it has become necessary for the library to understand the strengths of consortia and available opportunities to access maximum e-resources along with understanding of weaknesses and threats in it.

STRENGTHS

The very concept of consortium is cooperation and collaboration among consortia members for sharing of e-resources. Generally being in a team is a big strength

² <http://www.brighthubpm.com/methods-strategies/99629-history-of-the-swot-analysis/>

to achieve something. In academic libraries consortium strengths are:

- More resources in less cost
- Collection development without additional cost
- Consortium builds strong relationships among libraries
- Maximum information needs of users would be met on time.
- Enhances awareness about different category of e-resources
- Right information to the right user at the right time
- Saves the time of user
- Information on finger tips of user
- 24/7 access
- Common resources database for all participants
- Consortia reduces storage cost

WEAKNESS

Pros and cons are two faces of same coin. Without understanding the lacunas of a system promotion is not possible. Information industry is growing fast and information has to reach fast the end users through few stakeholders - in this process the following issues may be considered as drawbacks/weaknesses of consortium:

- lack of understanding of actual benefits
- Budget & staff cuts in libraries
- Lack of collaboration among members
- Increasing cost of e-resources
- Funding constraints
- Problems with transfer of funds
- Lack of IT infrastructure
- Lack of IT trained staff
- Lack of awareness about e-resources among users
- Lack of publicity about e-resources

OPPORTUNITIES

Teaching, research and development activities require variety of information sources. Keeping in mind the weaknesses of the organization, opportunities are to be identified for strengthening the information base, one of the opportunities is to enter in to consortia and continue to have subscription with lower cost and higher information access. Some of the opportunities are:

- consortia purchases always provides better offer and more benefits
- Technical expertise in Information and Communication Technologies

- More buying capacity and collaborated strength
- Cost-effectiveness in the delivery of services and products
- Back file Archival facility
- Revolution in electronic literacy
- Reduces the dependency on print materials
- Classroom teachings will become innovative and very effective
- Users perspective towards libraries may change
- Changes in the role of librarian
- Better negotiation with vendors/publishers
- Develops technical capabilities in staff

THREATS

No doubt consortium is a boon to academic world in terms of e-resources. But it is not free from threats as well. Consortium while emerging comes up with its own mission, vision and goals. However in the operational stage because of many constraints it fails to reach the fixed goals. FORSA consortium is best example to quote. It's not operating now and members of this consortium are under another consortium now. The Threatening issues are:

- Copyright and licensing issues
- Distrust among members may leads to problem in consortium negotiations
- Difficult to set up IT infrastructure in all academic institutions
- Continuous subscription of consortia materials in academic institutions is still a million dollar question due to budget constraints.
- Purchase of bundled e-resources is not suitable to all members
- Uncertainty in e-resources prices
- Management issues

SUMMARY

Consortium of e-resources is boon in academic library environment. Many initiatives are seen at national and international levels by publishers, vendors and by aggregators. Business strategies are being developed among all these stake holders to sell electronic resources under the arena of consortium. Pricing and organizational models are emerged among homogeneous and heterogeneous groups to purchase e-resources with effective negotiations. SWOT analysis is an essential strategy to evaluate consortium advantages, disadvantages and required changes to make consortium better means of e-resources sharing and usage among user community.

NOTES

<http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub115/sec3.html>

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/swot-analysis/main>

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