

# Library as a Consortium: A Comprehensive Analysis of Literature

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

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**Introduction:** Over the past three decades, academic libraries have increasingly relied on consortial collaboration to address escalating subscription costs, rapid digital transformation, and expanding user demands. The shift from collection ownership to access-based models has repositioned library consortia as strategic infrastructures for resource sharing and collective negotiation. Despite their growing importance, research on library consortia remains fragmented across economic, technological, governance, and regional perspectives.

**Objectives:** This paper systematically analyses the role of library consortia in the Web of Science from the published literature for the periods between 1992 to 2024.

**Methods:** This study employed a systematic literature review by following a structured approach for scrutinizing and synthesizing the academic research publications in the domain of library consortia. The Web of Science database is chosen to carry out this study and 147 documents authored by 264 researchers published across 38 different journals are systematically analysed. It identifies key themes, including economic benefits, digital transformation, governance challenges, and global perspectives, using bibliometric mapping tools such as VOSviewer and Biblioshiny to visualize and analyze research trends and emerging themes from 1992-2024.

**Results:** The study finds the shift from collection building to resource access driven by technological advancements and financial constraints in the research area of library and information science. It addresses the challenges faced by developing countries in participating in consortia and underscores emerging opportunities like open access and collaborative training. On the one side library consortia pool financial resources for better negotiated deals with publishers, on the other side, libraries benefit from improved access to digital resources. The research concludes by emphasizing the need for continuous assessment and adaptation within consortia to ensure long-term viability and relevance in the academic sector, even calling for a national consortium in India.

**Conclusions:** This is a comprehensive literature analysis of the published papers in the field of library consortia. This would highlight the progress and development of the concept of library consortia worldwide. This analysis finds that strategic collaborations and technological investments will be critical to sustaining and evolving library consortia in the digital era.

**Keywords:** Library consortia, library consortium, resource sharing, library collaboration, library networking

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## INTRODUCTION

The last two decades witness the transformation of information seeking behaviour of library patrons and the superiority of library to be a definer of intellectual supporters. Later, libraries have been disconnected as the essential physical destination for teaching, learning and research by the digital growth. But the traditional roles of library as the superior in evaluating, organizing, and delivering the right information resources are continued even in the case of electronic resources. The advancement of information technology has made libraries reevaluate the conventional strategies used for the collection, organization, and distribution of information resources. They, especially in the

academic circle, look for ways to work together to increase their efficiency due to the increased demands of patron and literature. Thus, the focus is shifted from collection building to expanding access to resources.

Even if library has the strong and necessary financial backing, it cannot be considered as self-sufficient enough (Ahmed & Suleiman, 2013; Ilesanmi, 2012). Library consortia are essential for enabling libraires to share resources and lessen financial burdens. They provide access to large number of academic resources and overcome the existing challenges like financial constraints and the serial crisis along with supporting the development of infrastructure, networking and qualitative training for staff. The analysis of Kopp (1998) on library consortia pointed up that the term consortium appeared in the domain of library and information science in 1950's and 60's in the context of sharing resources and services, negotiation with information service providers, and library funding. "The main role of consortium is to coordinate, supervise and monitor the interests of all parties" (Ye et al., 2018)

### CONSORTIA IN LIBRARY DOMAIN

When libraires intend best outcome from the limited resources, consortia constitute a qualitative leap in cooperation, coordination, efficiency, and cost savings. "Library consortia refers to the co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration between and among libraries for the purpose of sharing information resources" (Moghaddam & Talawar, 2009). The tiny spark of library consortia are reported in 1960s for sharing resources by reduction of costs, until 1980s this collaboration in library domain is not common (Moghaddam & Talawar, 2009). Though the concepts like collaboration, cooperation, and resource sharing are not new in library domain, the consortia theme promotes mutual benefits of the member libraires where new configurations in library services are demanded with in the concepts like 'electronic', 'digital', or 'virtual' information resources (Barrionuevo, 2000). Being a repository of knowledge, no libraries can move out of their traditional character, but factors like technological, socio-economic, institutional and changing atmosphere in the higher educational sector pressurize the libraries to accompany with technological and information revolution. High material costs for the resources and fixed budgets of academic libraries struggle the traditional libraries in providing effective services according to the need of time.

The development of internet and emergence of electronic publishing induce the libraries to collaborate for big deal packages through consortia (Jeon & Menicucci, 2017). The prime motive behind the formation of consortium is to share information resources, increase the research productivity, cost savings, and promote participation based on mutual benefits (Arora et al., 2013; Bashirullah & Jayaro, 2006). The access to e-resources through consortia has increased the research productivity. Increase in the number of publications and demands for library services, high cost of publications, decline of library budgets, hike of students enrollment in higher education sector, automation process in libraires, qualitative storage possibilities are the main driving forces behind the collaboration of academic libraries (Baathuli Nfila & Darko-Ampem, 2002; Moghaddam & Talawar, 2009).

Inability of many libraries to meet the demands of the patrons, adopting new technologies, and purchasing variety of electronic information resources individually thinks in favour of joining a consortium to provide quality information services (Thornton, 2000). Thomas and Fourie (2006) listed that the political, social and economic conditions of South Africa transformed library and related services and the end result was the formation of library consortia. It was reported that the traditional roles of the library consortia such as joint purchase of resources, resource sharing, and common licensing agreements were surpassed with the beginning of collaborative networking, training for literary skills, improved access to electronic resources, specialist training for library staffs, and even there were plans to organize virtual reference services for the higher education institution. The most significant financial achievement is the creation of collective purchasing consortia for all the participating members than sharing already purchased resources (Lynch, 2000) and creates greater chances for better terms for resources (Pisani, 2002). Formation of consortium is complex process due to their policies, procedures, and unique system of dissemination of information though it considers as a practical and economical platform to share the resources due to financial and other challenges.

### METHODOLOGY

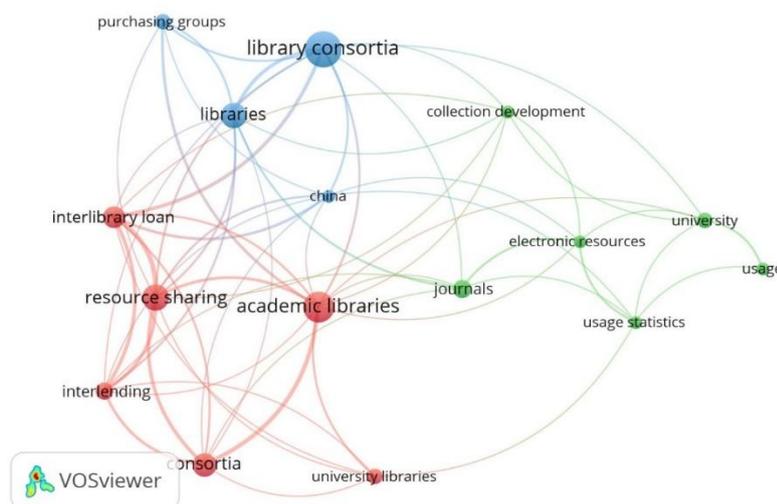
The systematic literature review by following a structured approach both scrutinizes and synthesizes academic research publications in any domain. Thus, it improves the quality, objectivity and trustworthiness of a review process by minimizing bias. In systematic literature review, a researcher starts with clear objectives and makes use of specific parameters to filter and include studies. This would involve in the final selection of relevant literature by filtering through type of studies, publication dates, languages, or other suitable factors. This type of analysis would provide a

comprehensive and reliable synthesis of existing knowledge and as a result evidence-based decision making would be applicable for policy makers, decision makers, and practitioners. Furthermore, standardize understanding of the area, assessing trends, and establish a space upon which further research and innovations would be possible are the direct results of this perspective.

Web of Science (WoS) database is chosen to carry out systematic literature analysis on library consortia. The search is carried out by the following keywords “library consortia” or “library consortium” in the “topic” search box. Since the terms used for search indicate directly the field of library and information science, no other areas would be selected for further filtering. The search was made on April 24, 2025. At the initial stage, 168 documents were found. Afterwards, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. These criteria include the selection of articles from the document types and of English from the languages. This process left a sample of 147 articles for further review. Among the document types, articles were only selected as this document type would be accessed completely and would mark significant impacts made within a research domain. The English language is preferred as this has the dominations over other languages for the scientific publications and communications. VOSviewer version 1.6.20 is applied for the data analysis that is centered on the bibliometric mapping approach. Additionally, Biblioshiny, a web interface built on the R language bibliometrix package, was utilized for the analysis of the retrieved data.

Selection of Database	Web of Science (WoS)
Key words	“library consortia” OR “library consortium” N=168
Article (Document Types)	N=150
English (Languages)	N=147

Bibliometric mapping would be more effective to visualize different aspects and patterns of the published literature. VOSviewer provides different approaches to analyze the produced literature such as the association of terms, co-occurrences of author’s keywords and keyword plus, bibliographic coupling that would reveal different characteristics of the literature in a domain. Bibliographic mapping applied in this study is based on the total count of the co-occurrence of all keywords including author’s keywords and keyword plus where the occurrences of keywords were limited to five. Other parameters for this analysis are as recommended by the software as standard. Clusters are formed on the basis of association of keywords. The strongly associated keywords are represented in Figure 1.



*Figure 1 Association of Keywords*

From the retrieved data, three clusters are formed based. Figure 1 shows the cluster formation. Cluster 1 in red colour shows 6 items such as academic libraries, consortia, inter-lending, interlibrary loan, resource sharing, and university libraries. This cluster centres more on the participatory and service-related functions of library consortium. In cluster 2, green in colour, there are 6 items namely, collection development, electronic resources, journals, university, usage, and usage statistics. Here, the concentration is more on internal assessment and inner functions. The third cluster in blue, relates with the purchasing power and other related concerns which connects with the items such as China,

libraries, library consortia, and purchasing groups. Thereafter, based on these three clusters, WoS was consulted again to find out the co-relation among the published works based on the author’s keywords. This would help to identify how this domain has been handled within the published literature.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### SYNOPSIS OF DATA PRESENTATION

The systematic literature analysis on WoS database identifies 147 documents published from 1992 to 2024. And these 147 documents are having collaboration with 264 authors, and these are published in 38 different journals. Figure 2 shows the top ten journals in which majority of the documents are published and these top ten sources represent 68.49% of the total research publications in the area of library consortia. Figure 3 explains the annual scientific production from 1992 to 2024, the highest number of publications (11) is noted in 2013, and it can be identified as its peak. The data does not claim that discussion on library consortia was not present before 1992 rather it speaks that this database has its indexed articles from 1992. According to WoS database, this period would mark as a stage of emergence. Thereafter it enters into a period of growth due to technological advancements.

Figure 4 presents the words’ frequency over time. This is based on the keywords specified by the author. This would help to identify how the topic of research has developed over these years. Library consortia (21), academic libraires (16) and resource sharing (14) are the three main keywords employed these years by different authors. Though the keyword ‘university libraries’ appears 8 times, it shows its presence from 1992 onwards. The keywords such as inter lending, inter library loan, and purchasing show how library consortia as a domain is developed throughout these years.

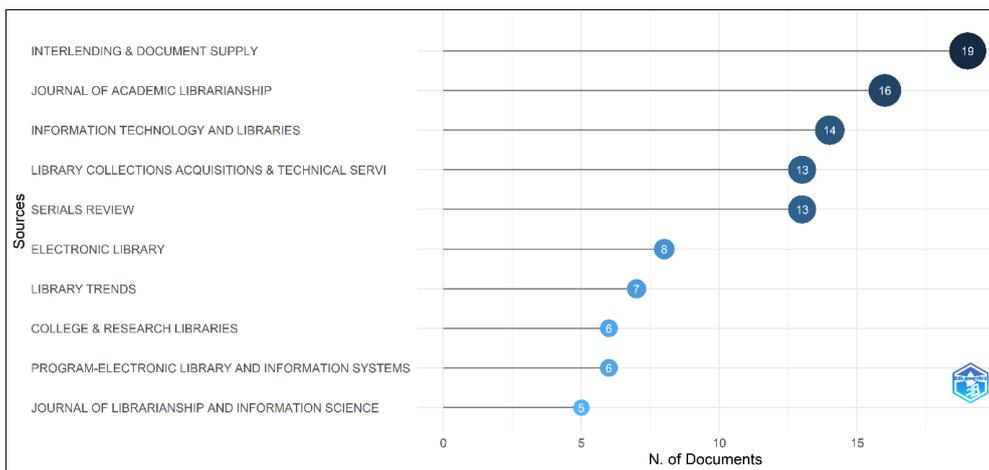


Figure 2 Most Relevant Sources

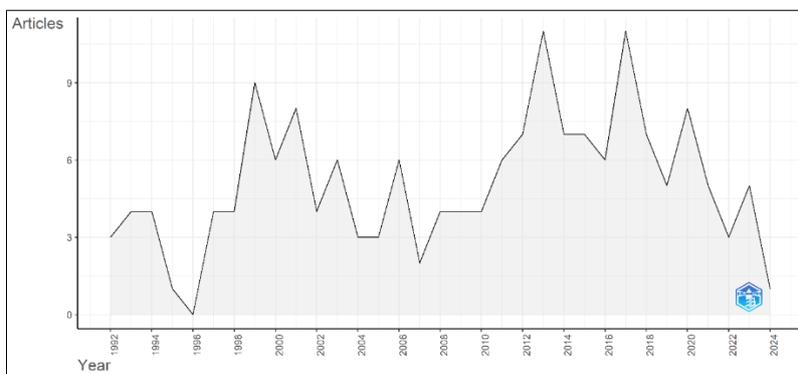


Figure 3 Annual Scientific Production

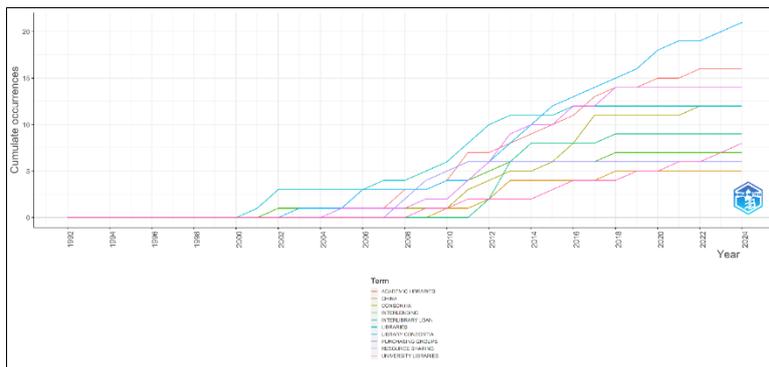


Figure 4 Keywords' Frequency Over Time

A thematic mapping of library consortia offers (Figure 5) a visual summary of the subject areas of the domain in which topics are classified and arranged depending on their levels in centrality (importance) and density (development). This thematic map would comprehend how various areas of research are grouped and how they relate to one another.

The top right quadrant, niche themes, includes specialized topics which are highly developed but are less linked to other themes whereas the top left quadrant, motor themes, contains the topics that leads research forward and having strong link with other themes. Here in the figure, the terms like academic libraries and library literacy are positioned in the center of niche and motor themes. This placement highlights that the research in these areas is having high density and high centrality, means this area is well developed and strongly linked to other themes. Academic libraries serve as a critical foundation of library consortia researches and help to advance the areas like information accessibility, resource sharing, and collaboration within higher education institutions. Similarly, library literacy has dual role in niche and motor themes. It would be the key factor in the success of consortium and the same would impact on the facilities like resource sharing and information accessibility.

In thematic map, impact patterns and university usage costs are positioned in the top right quadrant, motor themes. These insights help consortia and academic institutions to evaluate the effectiveness of shared resources and services. The impact of consortia resources can be analysed by examining the patterns of usage statistics which would force to make more decision regarding the allocation of resources, subscriptions and identifying the demanded materials. In the rising cost of academic resources, the sustainability and effectiveness of library consortia is to be financially assessed. This is valuable for budgetary planning, negotiation, and cost distribution practices providing benefits to the member libraries. The themes like journals, electronic resources and open access in the thematic map are placed in the bottom left quadrant, meaning they are still evolving in relevance and research depth. Though journals are the primary resource, there might be a shift to their digital accessibility and other models of publications. The role of digital resources and open access is still at a transformative stage and needed to fully establish in consortia research.

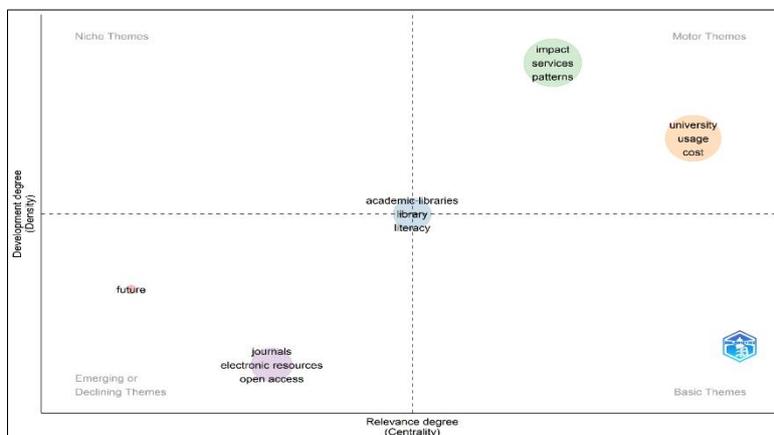


Figure 5 Thematic Mapping of Library Consortia

### 1. ECONOMIC AND RESOURCE-SHARING BENEFITS

Growing demand for information resources and the inability of the libraries to meet the same resulted in resource sharing (Taole & Dick, 2009). Vast majority of literature on library consortia revolves around the economic and resource sharing benefits by the collaboration. This collaboration creates an environment where pooling of financial resources among the member libraries is a necessity and therefore it results in negotiating with publishers and database providers for better deals for most probably majority of the libraries are under tight budgetary constraints. The consequences of this collaborative nature in the consortia fundamentally for digital resources are reduction of duplication of resources, increase the access to multiple resources, and optimization of subscription costs (Brooks & Dorst, 2002; Kostek, 2019; Turner, 2014). Efficiency and cost benefits, collective bargaining power, and shared infrastructure enhance the tendency of the libraries to participate in consortium (Al-Baridi, 2016; Scigliano, 2002) and this would improve the affordability of individual libraries (Sweet & Clarage, 2020). The particular services by the consortium will determine the advantages it offers (Al-Baridi, 2016).

Classical concept behind strength of the library is collection and collection building were the sole priority earlier. At present the ability of patrons to access information resources has higher value than the collection. At an affordable cost, libraries through collaboration creates opportunity to access more resources and the gap between information resource rich libraries and others are bridged (Ahmed & Suleiman, 2013; Moghaddam & Talawar, 2009). Library consortia accounted for monetarily beneficial for many of the libraries in United States (Kostek, 2019). Nevertheless, the additional assistance to the member libraries with centralized leadership and future oriented technological support valued this collaboration more worthwhile. The interlibrary loan borrowing becomes more complicated by the initiation of direct borrowing model though it proved its value. The most important economic benefit of library consortia in academic sector is the cost saving on interlibrary loan and document delivery.

The access to resources without limitations saved the time of patrons and made available the needed resources at their fingertips. The focus of consortia is not only at the availability of the resources but also at amount of time invested by the patron (Scigliano, 2002). It is highly demanded that both consortium and member libraries should regularly assess the latest trends and technological developments which encourage to maximize the resource sharing procedures and offer higher service efficiency (Kochan & Leon, 2013). The success of resource sharing by the consortia is connected with how consortia value their users place on the same. Though no prediction is reasonable regarding the libraries, at least for the foreseeable future, the cost-effective sharing of library resources would be continued among libraires, and this sharing would be accomplished mostly by virtue of library consortia.

### 2. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

To remain relevant in the academic circle, the libraries should strategically embrace digital technologies to ensure accessibility and inclusivity (Raja et al., 2024). Information technology changed all aspects of higher education and academic libraries cannot be in isolation in this context (Lynch, 2000). When technology is the crucial component in any library consortia, understanding and accepting the quick digital transformation are the deciding factors in the success of a library consortium. The rise and transformation of digital technologies reshaped the landscape of library and opened the opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing. It is necessary that the library should address the growing demands for electronic information resources and introduction of innovative services. The keystone of the recent literature on library consortia is the digital transformation of the libraries as library consortia would facilitate more access to digital resources by their collaborative nature. "Many consortia are at the forefront of deep collaborative projects that are transforming the library landscape" (Horton & Pronevitz, 2015). The value of the networking is considered as the one among the factors to join in library consortia (Al-Baridi, 2016).

Today's library consortia landscape is surrounded with various technological advancements and practices like cloud-based solutions for shared catalogues and data storage, artificial intelligence and machine learning tools for resource recovery and personalized user services, and expansion of digital repositories and open-access publishing platforms. Only by implementing new service models such as virtual reference services and digital literacy programmes, automating workflows, facilitating global knowledge sharing, seamless access to digital resources will enhance high impacts (Pisani, 2002; Raja et al., 2024). The development of shared technological infrastructure is not so easy, and it is one the critical issues examined in literature. Managing a centralized platform where integration of catalogues, access to multiple digital resources, development of specific software or other means for inter library loan systems, easy discovery of available resources, etc. is a technological challenge as library consortia start functioning. The

provision of access to electronic resources outside the library premises provided by library consortia force patrons to improve their computer skills for efficient use and improved research outputs (Scigliano, 2002). Careful planning, digital resource allocation, and continual assessment are necessary for a successful digital transformation strategy (Raja et al., 2024).

### **3. GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES**

The effectiveness of collaborative initiative among the libraries is often challenged by its governance and sustainability; both of these ensure the longevity of library consortia. Governance issues of consortia include decision making procedures, representation and dispute resolution procedures, whereas financial constraints, technological developments, and changing expectations of members are some of the sustainability concerns. It is recommended that the centralized leadership should be a crucial factor in the planning of consortium (Kostek, 2019). The centralized approach for evaluation is not enough to address the individual needs of the participating members; along with centralized evaluation, the same process should be followed at local level. Centralized system and server for the best performance of library consortia was appreciated while it had created the negative impacts on the relationship between the participating libraries regarding the technological establishments (Taole & Dick, 2009). The absence of centralized leadership in the collaboration undo many of the desired outcomes also. Effective application of various decisions is hindered by the individual interests of the members; the solution would be to strike a balance between centralized authority and the autonomy of the participating members. Functioning of consortia is basically with a sound agreement and guidelines where these can be mutually agreed or determined by a governing group. Both implementation of conflict resolution frameworks and regular assessment of both expectations and provided services would be noted as the best practices for the smooth functioning of any library consortia.

Stability of content is considered as an important quality to library consortia and also recommended as the factor for the renewal membership in consortia (Brooks & Dorst, 2002). Though the difference exists among the participating institutions, it is the responsibility of consortium as well as participating members to evaluate how the collection development and access to those collections are working (Jurczyk & Jacobs, 2014). The following factors such as vendor communication, customer supporting quality, regular database enhancements, and statistical reporting capabilities at service and support level would be encouraged necessarily for the smooth functioning and in return, the membership would be renewed by participated libraries. Purchasing full-text databases is considered as successful only if the factors like content quality, technical capabilities, and service support are carefully scrutinized and evaluated (Brooks & Dorst, 2002). The long-term viability of consortia is reinforced by introducing adaptive governance models and addressing the recent technological advancements.

Cost-benefit analysis is necessary and a suitable tool for academic library consortia to assess resource allocation and to find out their efficiencies (Scigliano, 2002). Funding is underscored as the major sustainability issue for majority of consortia (Ilesanmi, 2012). While purchasing the resources through the consortium, libraries, especially the academic libraries should take into account the following aspects, cost of similar databases, cost of same database offered by different vendor, and the cost of the database for a single library. Allocation of cost of consortia among the participating libraries observed as the greatest trouble for many of the issues of libraires are internal (Anderson, 2006; Yao & Zeng, 2012). Effective utilization of resources provided by the consortia is possible only by providing proper training for both patrons and library professionals (Al-Baridi, 2016).

### **4. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE ROLE OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

Collaboration and resource sharing among worldwide libraries is fostered by developed nations and they are the leaders even. In this regard, the role and participation of developing nations stand underexplored due to limited infrastructure, financial constraints, complex licensing agreements, and technological gaps. Economic progress of developing countries is connected with the access to adequate information resources available within the countries. When libraries of developing countries are under-funded, the improvement in the economic progress is negatively influenced (Ilesanmi, 2012). Not only do library consortia transform the provision of library services, but also encounter the multiple needs of users through resource sharing and would be noted as accelerating a country's development (Chisita & Dick, 2018). The purchasing power of library consortia exceptionally academic consortia controlled the price increase of big deal packages, notwithstanding the price increase drew criticism (Jurczyk & Jacobs, 2014). Libraries of developing countries often face hurdles such as unreliable internet, outdated systems, and limited funding. Consortium gained proper ground in developing countries due to its beneficial effects on academic

ground especially in teaching and learning activities and closed the research gap between developing and developed countries (Ilesanmi, 2012).

In developing countries, the efforts to have successful consortia face more challenges. While digitalizing and sharing indigenous knowledge resources through regional collaboration is necessary, the collaboration with international consortia is recommended to redefine and reengineer the efforts of developing nations and finally would support the collaboration in transition (Moghaddam & Talawar, 2009). However, the limited funding and technological gaps based on quality and effectiveness existing would drive back the developing nations from these initiatives (Yao & Zeng, 2012). One of the contributions from the developing countries is that to adopt cost-effective models and local expertism at functional levels. The strategic investments and global collaborations would help the libraries in developing regions to unlock the full potentiality of digital transformation and technological infrastructure.

### 5. EMERGING TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

When the participation of libraries through consortium becomes mandatory, meaningful participation may not be granted for the member libraries and some of them would take great advantages of the benefits dispensed from the collaboration. At the initial stage, library consortia focused on resource sharing and cost reduction, but there should be proper adoption of innovative practices to address emerging challenges and to create opportunities. Library consortia address evolving demands of its members including revised or new information services and research support, it finally compels the member libraries to renew their parent institution's vision and mission (Thomas & Fourie, 2006).

The three major issues library consortia are going to deal with in near future are open access, resource sharing, and renegotiation of big deals. Introduction and developments in the areas of full open access and hybrid journals create negative impacts on consortia business models; therefore an extra care and coordination are needed to be taken in the case of payments and publications (Cuhadar & Cimen, 2019). As the transformative agreements in open access emerge as the promising model and the support of library consortia for open access publishing would accelerate the speed of transition (Wise & Estelle, 2020).

The latest trends can be listed as follows: digital transformation, user centric services, and collaboration in training and learning. The shared cataloguing and information resource management through cloud-based platforms and other collaborative platforms for supporting open access initiatives are the latest digital trends whereas the personalized access to various resources and implementation of advanced analytics to user needs are the trends in user services (Adams, 2017). The uniqueness of library consortia is that it can support open access publishing by hosting institutional repositories and negotiating collective agreements with publishers. Enabling resource sharing at global level and adoption of artificial intelligent and machine learning tools for resource recovery and data management are the latest opportunities and also the challenges before library consortia. While discussing these trends and opportunities, there are concerns regarding data protection and user privacy (Lambert et al., 2015).

Proper use of the services provided by any consortium requires the application of marketing strategies like webinars, emails, and innovative techniques (Al-Baridi, 2016). Standardization of the resources with combining, analyzing and managing of the usage data with latest technologies do great works in the renewal process of the consortium and to understand the extent of usage of their purchased electronic resources. And in later adoption of best practices and standards to support the promotion of digital resources (Ye et al., 2018).

### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Libraries of this age must be more proactive in assessing and using the best solutions to improve efficiency as the rapid changes take place in major technological arena. Embracing the best practical ways make libraries viable than resisting the realities. In near future, a consortium trap would be possible where there is an association between short term gain and long term loss (Jeon & Menicucci, 2017). It is highly recommended that the traditional roles of library consortia such as resource sharing and collaboration for mutual benefits though they are the fundamental, need to be expanded with central storage services, advanced training services, quality assurance of database, data curation, and data preservation (Thomas & Fourie, 2006).

Collaborative nature of the libraries in the academic sector improves the efficiency and quality of individual libraries and strengthens the professional approach within the information research where the inexperienced patrons

benefits more from information resources as their libraries participated in consortium (Szpunar & Bradley, 2023). It is recommended always that the periodical discussion is necessary for the issues including budget allocation, membership problems, subscription increases, and allocation of resources. It is no longer financially stable for academic libraries to continue the practice of buying information resources individually as budgets shrink. Therefore, the crucial role of consortia emerges. While paying attention to the interests of all participating libraries in the consortium, regular observation is needed to the user needs and their feedback and to provide training and support materials on a regular basis.

The analysis part of this study finds that there are gaps in the research outputs and notes of some of the future directions in the environment of library consortia. Regarding the governance and sustainability challenges of consortia, there are limited studies on the cultural differences on governance in the international consortia and the role of artificial intelligence in the governance and sustainability is not yet flourished and even not touched. The role of academic libraries and library consortia in supporting the explosion of distance learning is not yet mentioned in detail in any of the studies. Basically, evaluation and examination at consortia level is very common and usual. Therefore, thorough evaluation at individual library level is advisable. Latest methods using artificial intelligence for the deep analysis of usage statistics of participating libraries in the case of electronic resources is considered as the primary concern because negotiation for pricing and renewal of the consortium usage statistics has the key role.

There is an urgent need to form a national consortium by merging all kinds of consortia programmes exist within the country. One noteworthy breakthrough in India's knowledge sharing activities is the recent opening of One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) policy that provides access to valuable information to all who participating in teaching and learning process. It is at its initial stage and expects that it would open its benefits to all in later phase. The most vital factor for the success of consortia is to provide information resources for better prices than libraries have been able to obtain alone.

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