Letter to Editor

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Evaluating the One Nation One Subscription Initiative: Implications for Access to Scholarly Resources in India

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines India's "One Nation One Subscription" (ONOS) initiative, which aims to deliver broad access across the country to digital academic resources through centralized subscriptions and bulk licensing agreements. The initiative addresses the challenges of fragmented access, high costs, and inequitable distribution of scholarly content, thereby promoting equitable access for all citizens. The paper highlights the essential role of Library and Information Science (LIS) specialists in areas such as policy formulation, collection oversight, user assistance, and effectiveness evaluation, which are crucial for the successful implementation of ONOS. Additionally, it discusses potential challenges, including infrastructure limitations and copyright issues, while offering recommendations for effective execution. Ultimately, ONOS aspires to enhance learning and research capabilities across educational institutions in India by ensuring comprehensive access to national and international scientific content.

Keywords: One Nation One Subscription (ONOS); Scholarly publishing; Open access; National Education Policy 2020; Academic resources; Digital inclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of academic research is undergoing a significant transformation, particularly in the context of access to scholarly publications. Traditionally dominated by subscription-based models, the scholarly publishing industry has faced increasing scrutiny over its accessibility and affordability. The Indian government's recent initiative, One Nation One Subscription (ONOS), aims to tackle these challenges by providing equitable access to a substantial array of scholarly journals for students, faculty, and researchers across the country. By facilitating access to approximately 13,000 e-journals from 30 major international publishers, ONOS is poised to democratize knowledge and enhance research capabilities, especially for those in tier 2 and tier 3 cities. This initiative is in harmony with the hazier goals outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the formation of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), both of which emphasize the necessity of robust research frameworks for India's development.

Given the current momentum in global discussions around open access and digital equity. The One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) initiative directly addresses critical challenges faced by Indian academia in accessing scholarly resources. As open access models and digital inclusion become central to research policy debates worldwide, evaluating ONOS provides valuable insights into how India is responding to these transformative trends and striving to democratize knowledge for all its researchers and students (Chhetri, 2024).

Despite these promising developments, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how initiatives like ONOS will impact the academic landscape in India. While ONOS seeks to provide access to high-quality research articles, questions arise regarding its long-term sustainability and alignment with global trends towards open-access publishing. The international scholarly publishing ecosystem is increasingly shifting towards open-access models that promote the free availability of research outputs. A substantial proportion of scientific papers globally are now accessible through various forms of open access. This trend raises critical questions about the financial prudence of investing heavily in subscription-based models at a time when many institutions are advocating for more inclusive and accessible research dissemination practices.

The objective of this study is to critically analyse the ONOS initiative within the context of these ongoing changes in scholarly publishing. Specifically, this research aims to investigate how ONOS can effectively contribute to enhancing access to academic resources while addressing inherent challenges such as copyright issues and reliance on commercial publishers. Furthermore, this study will explore whether ONOS can

catalyze the promotion of a more self-reliant and innovative publishing ecosystem in India. The primary research question guiding this investigation is: How does the implementation of ONOS align with global trends towards open-access publishing, and what implications does it have for Indian researchers and institutions?

In identifying the research gap, it becomes evident that while there is considerable discourse surrounding ONOS and its potential benefits, there has been limited empirical analysis regarding its effectiveness and alignment with contemporary publishing trends. Previous studies have primarily focused on the operational aspects of ONOS without delving into its broader implications for academic freedom, copyright retention, and institutional self-reliance in publishing. This research seeks to address this gap by offering a comprehensive examination of ONOS's potential impact on India's research ecosystem.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) programme signifies a significant shift in the landscape of academic publishing in India, aiming to provide equitable access to scholarly resources across diverse institutions. As highlighted by (Chhetri, 2024), ONOS seeks to centralize subscriptions and negotiate bulk licensing agreements with major publishers, thereby addressing the fragmented access and high costs that have historically limited research capabilities in the country. The initiative is designed not only to enhance access to educational institutions but also to close the digital gap by ensuring that citizens, regardless of their geographic or socioeconomic status, can access essential academic resources. This foundational goal aligns with the broader objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes inclusivity and accessibility in education (Chhetri, 2024).

Despite its ambitious goals, several challenges must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of ONOS. (Chari and Nagaiah, 2023) discuss potential drawbacks, including reduced institutional autonomy and the impact on existing library consortia that have been instrumental in improving access to research materials. They argue that while ONOS aims to streamline access and reduce costs through centralized negotiations, it may inadvertently limit individual institutions' ability to curate their collections based on specific needs. This concern is particularly relevant in a country as diverse as India, where academic disciplines vary significantly in their publication practices and resource requirements. The authors emphasize that careful consideration of these factors is essential for the long-term sustainability of both ONOS and existing library consortia.

The literature also points to a critical gap in understanding how ONOS interacts with the global trend towards open access (OA) publishing. (Koley and Lala, 2024) Argue that a subscription-only model may not be financially prudent given the increasing prevalence of OA articles. They highlight that many research outputs are already available through OA channels, suggesting that investing heavily in a blanket subscription could lead to unnecessary expenditures. This perspective is supported by data from Scopus, which indicates a significant rise in OA publications globally. The authors advocate for a more nuanced approach that incorporates both subscription models and OA initiatives, thereby fostering a more equitable scholarly communication system.

In addition to financial considerations, the implementation of ONOS raises questions about its alignment with international best practices in scholarly publishing. A study by (Koley and Lala, 2024) emphasizes the need for India to strengthen its domestic OA publishing infrastructure rather than relying solely on commercial publishers. They propose adopting models like those used in Ibero-American countries, which have successfully integrated both subscription and OA approaches to enhance accessibility while promoting local research output. This dual strategy not only reduces dependence on foreign publishers but also encourages the development of high-quality local journals, ultimately benefiting Indian researchers.

Furthermore, the role of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals is crucial in navigating these changes. As noted, (Chhetri, 2024), LIS professionals are essential for policy development, collection management, and user support within the ONOS framework. Their expertise will be vital in assessing the impact of ONOS on user engagement and resource utilization. However, challenges such as infrastructure limitations and copyright issues remain significant obstacles that need to be overcome to unlock the complete potential of this initiative (Chari and Nagaiah, 2023). Ensuring robust training programs for users can also enhance digital literacy, permitting them to make better use of accessible resources.

In conclusion, while ONOS presents an opportunity for transformative change in India's academic publishing landscape, it is imperative to critically assess its implementation strategies and potential impacts on existing structures. The literature indicates a pressing need for a multifaceted approach that embraces both subscription-based and open-access models while considering the unique needs of diverse academic disciplines across India. By doing so, ONOS can contribute not only to enhanced access but also to fostering a more self-sufficient and innovative research environment.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE ONE NATION ONE SUBSCRIPTION (ONOS) INITIATIVE

3.1 Overview of ONOS

The One Nation One Subscription (ONOS) proposal is a transformative policy aimed at providing equitable access to scholarly research across India. Launched by the Indian government, ONOS seeks to centralize subscriptions to academic journals and negotiate bulk licensing agreements with publishers. This approach is designed to address the fragmented access and high costs that have historically limited the availability of scholarly resources, particularly for institutions in tier 2 and tier 3 cities (Chhetri, 2024). The initiative is associated with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes inclusivity and accessibility in education.

3.2 Objectives of ONOS

3.2.1 Equitable Access

Ensuring that every citizen, irrespective of geographic location or socioeconomic status, exhibits access to digital academic resources.

3.2.2 Cost Reduction

Negotiating bulk licensing agreements to lower subscription costs for libraries and educational institutions.

3.2.3 Collaboration

Promoting cooperation between libraries, institutions, content providers, and technology suppliers to optimize resource use.

3.2.4 Enhanced Learning

Offering access to an extensive array of digital resources to improve learning and research capabilities.

3.2.5 Digital Inclusion

Bridging the digital gap by ensuring universal access to digital resources (Chari and Nagaiah, 2023).

3.3 Benefits of ONOS

3.3.1 Increased Access

By providing smooth access to a diverse array of digital resources, ONOS enables libraries and institutions to offer extensive collections of academic materials (Koley and Lala, 2024).

3.3.2 Cost Savings

Centralizing subscriptions can lead to significant cost savings for institutions by reducing duplication of subscriptions across multiple libraries (Chhetri, 2024).

3.3.3 Bridging the Digital Divide

ONOS aims to provide equitable access to digital resources for users in both metropolitan and rural regions, thus enhancing educational opportunities for all (Chari and Nagaiah, 2023).

3.3.4 User Empowerment

The initiative empowers users by enabling them to investigate various subjects and obtain specialized content customized to their requirements. (Koley and Lala, 2024).

3.3.5 Promotion of Digital Literacy

By offering access to digital resources and training programs, ONOS promotes digital literacy among users (Chhetri, 2024).

3.4 Challenges in Implementation

3.4.1 Infrastructure Constraints

Constrained internet infrastructure in specific localities may hinder effective implementation and access (Chari and Nagaiah, 2023).

3.4.2 Copyright Issues

Negotiating licensing contracts with content contributors can be complex and may pose legal challenges regarding copyright compliance (Koley and Lala, 2024).

3.4.3 Financial Constraints

Budget limitations may restrict institutions' ability to subscribe to necessary resources or upgrade their infrastructure (Chari and Nagaiah, 2023).

3.4.4 User Awareness

Users may have limited awareness of available digital resources and require training to utilize them (Koley and Lala, 2024) effectively.

3.4.5 Content Diversity

Ensuring a diverse range of content that meets the specialized needs of various academic disciplines poses a significant challenge (Chhetri, 2024).

3.5 Future Directions

3.5.1 Strengthening Local Journals

The development of a robust domestic publishing infrastructure can reduce dependence on commercial publishers and promote local research initiatives.

3.5.2 Hybrid Models

Incorporating both subscription-based and open-access models can cater to diverse academic needs and enhance resource availability.

3.5.3 Collaboration with Library Consortia

Partnering with existing library consortia can leverage their negotiating power while ensuring that diverse institutional needs are met.

3.5.4 Investment in Infrastructure

Enhancing internet connectivity and digital infrastructure is vital for the successful implementation of ONOS.

3.5.5 Continuous Assessment

Regular evaluation of user engagement and resource utilization can refine the initiative's approach over time.

4. THE ROLE OF LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS IN ONE

4.1 Importance of Library and Information Science Specialists

LIS professionals are pivotal in ONOS implementation, particularly in policy-making, collection development, negotiations with publishers and user education. They are responsible for developing institutional policies that ensure equitable access, negotiating copyright compliance, and integrating ONOS resources with existing collections. Their role extends to training users, promoting digital literacy, and conducting ongoing impact assessments to refine resource allocation (Chhetri, 2024).

Effective ONOS implementation also requires robust data security protocols. LIS professionals must collaborate with IT departments to ensure secure authentication, encrypted data transmission, and compliance with privacy regulations. Data governance frameworks should address user consent, data retention, and intellectual property protection, balancing open access with legal and ethical obligations (Munshi, 2021).

4.2 Policy Development

LIS professionals are instrumental in shaping policies that govern resource access within academic institutions. They can advocate for user-centred approaches that prioritize equitable access while ensuring compliance with copyright regulations. By participating in policy discussions related to ONOS, LIS professionals can help design frameworks that address institutional needs while promoting collaboration among stakeholders (Chari and Nagaiah, 2023).

4.3 Collection Management

Effective collection management is vital for ensuring that libraries offer relevant resources that meet user needs. LIS professionals must evaluate existing collections and identify gaps that need addressing through ONOS. This involves curating a diverse range of materials that cater to various academic disciplines while considering user preferences (Koley and Lala, 2024).

4.4 User Support and Training

As users navigate new digital platforms introduced by ONOS, LIS professionals must provide ongoing support and training. This includes developing user guides, conducting workshops on accessing digital resources, and offering personalized assistance. Enhancing users' digital literacy skills will empower them to make full use of available resources (Chhetri, 2024).

4.5 Impact Assessment

To gauge the effectiveness of ONOS in improving access to scholarly resources, continuous impact assessment is necessary. LIS professionals can conduct surveys and analyze usage data to evaluate how well the initiative meets its objectives. This feedback loop will inform future adjustments needed for optimizing resource allocation and enhancing user experience (Chari and Nagaiah, 2023).

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH GLOBAL INITIATIVES

5.1 Overview of Global Open Access Trends

Globally, there has been a significant shift towards open-access publishing models aimed at increasing accessibility to scholarly research. Countries like Germany and Sweden have implemented national strategies promoting open-access initiatives that emphasize public funding for research outputs (Munshi, 2021). These models serve as valuable benchmarks for India's ONOS initiative.

5.2 Lessons from International Models

India can learn from successful international initiatives by adopting hybrid models that combine subscription-based access with open-access frameworks. For instance:

- Germany's Plan S Initiative emphasizes immediate open-access publication as a requirement for publicly funded research.
- Sweden's National Library Strategy focuses on negotiating transformative agreements with publishers that allow for both subscription-based access and open-access publication options.

5.3 Strengthening Local Publishing Ecosystems

Countries like Brazil have successfully developed robust local publishing ecosystems through government support for indigenous journals. India could benefit from similar investments aimed at enhancing local journal quality while reducing reliance on international publishers (Koley and Lala, 2024).

5.4 Addressing Disciplinary Differences

International initiatives often recognize the diverse publishing practices across disciplines. For example:

- In STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields where subscription models dominate, countries have developed targeted strategies that support both traditional journals and emerging open-access platforms.
- India should consider similar tailored approaches that address the unique needs within its varied academic landscape.

5.5 Recommendations for India's Future Directions

To align with global best practices while implementing ONOS effectively:

- India should adopt a flexible approach that accommodates both subscription-based models and open-access publishing.
- Investment in local journal development should be prioritized alongside negotiations with international publishers.
- Continuous dialogue with stakeholders, including researchers, will ensure that the evolving needs of academia are met.
- Establishing an Umbrella Body for ONOS is crucial for ensuring effective operation and coordination with innovative services built around the initiative (Rathinasabapathy and Veeranjaneyulu, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

The One Nation One Subscription idea represents a pivotal moment in India's academic publishing landscape by aiming to democratize access to scholarly resources across diverse institutions. While supporting NEP 2020's vision for inclusive and innovative research, its objectives also align closely with global trends towards open-access publishing, substantial challenges persist concerning implementation logistics, infrastructure limitations, copyright concerns, and financial constraints, user awareness, content diversity, technical integration challenges, data privacy concerns. To maximize the potential benefits offered by ONOS, such as increased accessibility for all citizens, India must adopt a multifaceted approach that encompasses both traditional subscription models and innovative open-access strategies tailored specifically for its unique academic environment. The involvement of Library and Information Science professionals will be crucial in navigating these changes through effective policy development and collection management practices tailored towards user needs. In conclusion, while ONOS holds promise for transforming scholarly communication in India by bridging gaps in access across various demographics, its success will ultimately depend on addressing existing challenges head-on while fostering collaboration among stakeholders within academia.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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