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LIS journals in India: a critical analysis

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The paper attempts to highlight key issues confronting library and information science journals published from India as experienced by the author during teaching and research besides being associated with some journals in different capacities. However, the concerns need further deliberation to ascertain valid reasons and for improvement of the journals as well as betterment of research and scholarship in information studies in the country.

Keywords: LIS journals-India; key issues in LIS; LIS journals – quality, LIS journals – key issues

Introduction

Scholarly journals of a country reflect the quality of research being carried out in that part of the world. Though technology has made journal publication easy, the majority of LIS journals published from India are yet to make their mark internationally. This essay is a reflection and an attempt to ponder upon some critical issues leading to dismal picture of LIS journals in the country.

The teaching of LIS in India in over 90 universities produces scores of practising professionals and teachers who contribute papers and other material in publications such as magazines, journals, conference proceedings, international and national seminars, bibliographies, books etc. without any aptitude, apprenticeship or experience. The motivation for writing seems to be largely driven by ‘C.V factor’ to target a higher level entry straightaway or rely on it for a promotion or other professional gains. The “OA movement” has not yet consolidated but has led to the growth of about 400 predatory publishers who prey on aspirant authors. India has completed 100 years of LIS journal publishing with its first LIS journal, *Library Miscellany* (1912-19) appearing in 1912¹. India has about 70 LIS journals in different languages ranking 4th in world list almost equal to China, contributing about 4.12% of world output. However, the estimate is not compatible with the present list of Ulrich’s International Directory listing only 32 LIS journals from the country. The alarming position is that none of the journals is indexed by *WoS* and

Scopus covers only two journals. Besides, as reported by Mahesh and Wadhwa², about half a dozen journals are indexed by LISA and LISTA. The picture overall reflects not only the quality of Indian research but also the policy of the journals with regard to publishing, reviewing and editing.

The Indian LIS research in 1930s and thereafter did leave some footprints on the global LIS map. It has, however, not left any concrete and sustainable direction for the profession or discipline to take a lead except some publishing theories and practices particularly in ‘Classification and Indexing’ processes.

The 21st century posed many challenges like issues of sustainability, modes of access, and increased awareness among authors who are contributing papers to foreign journals to gain better scores for promotion. The language dominance continues to be English. The online version acted as a stimulator for the growth but issues of quality remain. There are negligible number of journals from learned societies and a few from associations are of average quality. But a new breed of journals owned by *.com community* evidently for commercial ends is growing in number. These journals are an easy avenue for those authors eager to get their mediocre or poor papers published.

Research pattern in Indian LIS journals

The statement or elucidation of a research question and subsequent research methodology adopted for its

investigation, normally appearing in Indian LIS journals, is not well oriented or defined. This is further made worse by not having scientific sampling procedures or suitable hypothesis formulation or testing thereof. The context of the papers is mostly local or regional in nature. The studies mostly relate to simple bibliometric analysis such as growth and nature of publications or authors, growth statistics largely based on different directories like Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Registry of Open Access Repositories (ROAR) or *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory* etc, survey of different entities by merely giving a statistical overview without adequate discussion or inferences. The experimental method has not been fully explored and meta-analysis is still Greek to Indian library scientists as evident from the contents of LIS journals. All these have resulted in poor research and consequent publications appearing in Indian LIS journals. The listing of Indian LIS journals in prominent databases such as *WoS*, *Scopus*, *LISA* or *LISTA* is sparse owing to the lack of a popular and visible Indian LIS abstracting and indexing database.

Indian LIS journals also suffer from meager readership. This can be attributed to many factors like theme or content which is not of current importance. Besides, journals have not really emerged in specialized areas but instead wrap a mixture of areas. This and other reasons including poor printing quality, late issuance of the journals etc. result in reduced readership of Indian LIS journals. The mechanism of publishing and distribution is also of grave concern for many reasons. The manuscript editing to distribution is sometimes handled by non-professionals.

Quality deterioration, editorship & regularity

The quality problems may be attributed to multiple factors like writing for name and fame sake, editorial or advisory bodies without any definite roles or activities in shaping the journal. Their nature is ambiguous and responsibility is undefined and nominations are merely based on personal relations or high designations. The other serious factor is quality of review process. In Indian situation, it seems to be more of a myth than reality. If it ever exists in some journals, it is limited to some local experts who have less interest in reviewing owing to many pre-occupations. This non-seriousness or non-cooperation and non-commitment to scholarship culture in the

profession on a large scale has made Indian journals less significant in the global community of professionals. However, our authors have moved to other journals for either earning laurels or keeping in view the status of local journals losing sheen with the growth and changing scope of LIS field. The appointment of editor / chief editor / guest editor is now listed in every journal without their evident contribution or even efforts in re-shaping or refining the policy or contents of the journal. Most journals are also not maintaining a right calendar and frequency of most journals is either annual or bi-annual, leaving aside few journals published on quarterly or monthly basis. Hence it has also affected the choice and submission of papers by authors in such journals and consequently dwindled their use and citation metrics. Besides, authors have become demanding being now fully aware of impact factor / H-index etc., thus leading better authors to contribute to impact journals outside the country. Hence executive editors need to draw together more efforts to make journals regular, frequent and improve the overall quality of their journals.

Ethics and conflict of interest

The ethics of editors and authors has become a more serious problem, as the number of flawed papers is increasing exponentially. The checks and vigilance have become more mechanical with the availability of anti-plagiarism software. The errant authors make many excuses including fixing responsibility on a junior author. It has also become a matter of least concern of authorities and no mechanism is in place to enforce punishments. The conflict of interest is less evident in LIS unlike other disciplines like medicine, marketing or biotechnology where papers are sponsored or published to highlight key features of their products for commercial gains. The non-acknowledgement of legitimate contributions exists in many hues. The quite glaring examples are that all M.Lib Sc projects done in a short span of few months or M.Phil / Ph.D theses written on repetitive or rusted areas make an easy basis for many papers where supervisor(s) find place as principal authors without even having a cursory look at its article contents.

The current state of Indian LIS journals is not rosy. Much needs to be done to reenergize the spirit among Indian LIS professionals to work on different areas of

information studies and publish high quality papers in Indian LIS journals.

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