



The Impact of One Nation, One Subscription on Indian Libraries: Issues, Opportunities, and Strategic Challenges

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Abstract

The Government of India's One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) initiative seeks to give everyone in the country, irrespective of location or socioeconomic status, inexpensive digital access to scholarly literature. The crucial contributions made by library and information science (LIS) professionals to ONOS are examined in this article, with particular attention paid to their responsibilities in policy creation, cooperation with various stakeholders, license negotiations, copyright management, and library network coordination.

In order to address users' changing needs, key tasks like digital collection curation, user guidance, digital literacy training, and continuous evaluation of ONOS's efficacy are emphasized. The ONOS plan poses significant problems for existing library consortia, whose conventional functions may be redefined or weakened by centralized government agreements, even though it promises to democratize access, promote lifelong learning, and increase research innovation. However, greater government involvement can help these consortia in terms of sustainability and economic effectiveness. In order to ensure significant results for India's research and academic communities, this essay highlights the importance of librarians in navigating and steering the changing environment of academic communication defined by ONOS by examining these potential and challenges.

Keywords: One Nation One Subscription (ONOS), Digital Literacy, Library and Information Science (LIS) Professionals, Subscription Policy, Library Consortia, Scholarly Communication, Data Privacy

INTRODUCTION

The One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) project in India represents a significant turning point in the country's endeavor to democratize access to academic resources. ONOS, which was introduced in January 2025, is intended to give more than 1.8 crore students, teachers, and researchers from 6,300 government-supported institutions free or significantly subsidized digital access to more than 13,000 scholarly journals in the social sciences, science, and technology. This centrally coordinated program, run by INFLIBNET and supported by a

₹6,000 crore budget, closes long-standing access barriers that have hurt academics and students from underfunded institutions and areas.

By eliminating geographical and financial obstacles to scholarly communication and research and fostering innovation in line with national objectives like Viksitbharat@2047 and the National Education Policy 2020, the ONOS program seeks to level the playing field for Indian academics. The library and information science (LIS) community, whose responsibilities now include policy input, digital resource management, legal compliance, user training, and the evaluation of ONOS's practical impact, has difficult implementation issues. It is more important than ever to manage digital literacy, negotiate copyright, preserve consortia autonomy, and guarantee meaningful participation for all knowledge stakeholders.

This article examines the critical role librarians play in implementing ONOS, stressing both advantages and challenges, and makes the case that their active participation is essential for connecting policy objectives with inclusive, strong academic practice in India. The paper highlights the critical roles played by LIS experts in constructing the country's knowledge infrastructure for a vibrant future by examining both the strategic benefits and operational difficulties of ONOS.

OBJECTIVE:

1. To examine how library and information science experts contribute to the successful implementation of India's One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) program.
2. To determine and evaluate the main challenges, opportunities, and modifications that librarians encounter when attempting to guarantee fair access to digital scholarly materials in accordance with the ONOS policy.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The ONOS initiative, operational since January 2025, is widely discussed in the context of democratizing access to academic and research journals in India. Literature emphasizes the program's goal of providing seamless, affordable digital content access to over 13,000 journals across 6,300 government-funded institutions, supporting national priorities such as self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and the Viksitbharat@2047 vision for advanced knowledge societies. (More, 2025)

Scholarly evaluations typically highlight several positive impacts: strategic negotiations ensure cost-effective access to global publications, consolidation of subscription agreements reduces duplication and budget inefficiencies, and academic excellence and innovation are promoted for students and researchers. Authors such as Lalita et al. (2023) observe that ONOS extends the consortia model to the national scale, thereby directly addressing financial barriers, especially in rural and less-resourced settings. (Dhamija, 2025)

At the practical level, academic and policy analyses stress the evolving role of librarians. Studies argue that librarians are transitioning from institutional procurement managers to facilitators of digital access, literacy educators, and contributors to collaborative national resource networks. Their responsibilities now include user education on ONOS platforms,

usage data analysis, policy feedback, and participation in resource-sharing consortia. Adaptation challenges include developing expertise in digital resource management, managing increased demand, and aligning local needs with standardized national systems.(Patil, 2025) (Balani, 2025)

Evaluative research also points to several unresolved issues and challenges. Key among these are bridging the digital divide between urban and rural areas, eliminating educational and linguistic disparities, tackling infrastructural and licensing constraints, and maintaining the long-term sustainability of library consortia under a government-led system. Some reports highlight the need for tiered, adaptable implementation strategies, ongoing impact assessment, and recommendations for continuous improvement.(Chhetri, 2024)

Ultimately, the literature suggests ONOS represents a transformative but complex shift in India's knowledge management landscape. Success depends on strategic collaboration among government, librarians, publishers, and consortia, with LIS professionals pivotal in navigating policy objectives and practical realities for equitable, high-quality academic resource access.(Agarwal, 2024)

METHODOLOGY:

In order to investigate librarians' experiences within the framework of India's One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) project, this study uses a qualitative research design. Comprehensive document analysis of reliable web sources, such as government policy documents, reports from library associations, academic journals, and pertinent news coverage, was used to gather data. This method made it easier to comprehend the duties of the ONOS program, the difficulties faced by library and information science (LIS) experts, and possible solutions. The study also investigates how ONOS affects conventional library subscription arrangements, with an emphasis on library consortia operations and their long-term sustainability. This document-based study offers insightful information about the real-world effects of ONOS on India's library industry and its developing knowledge infrastructure.

ONE NATION ONE SUBSCRIPTION (ONOS):

With more than 160,000 English-language publications in 2022, India became the third-largest publisher of research articles worldwide, demonstrating a notable growth in research output in recent years. The increase in government and institutional financing for academia and science is primarily responsible for this boom. Despite this remarkable amount, access to scholarly literature is still a significant barrier, particularly for researchers and institutions in underprivileged areas who face pay walls and costly memberships.

The inability of many educational institutions, especially those in economically disadvantaged areas, to pay for subscriptions to significant scholarly databases and journals limits the international reach of Indian scholarship and hinders scholars' ability to stay up to date with global research developments. In order to promote resource sharing and enhance research

accessibility, a number of libraries have established consortia and institutional repositories. Additionally, there is a growing trend toward open access publishing, which aims to make academic knowledge freely accessible both domestically and globally.

In order to address these ongoing issues, the ONOS program was established, which ensures that all citizens have quick and inexpensive access to a variety of digital scholarly journals. ONOS seeks to minimize unnecessary subscriptions, enable libraries to collaborate more successfully, and offer equal chances for academic involvement regardless of institutional or geographic boundaries. The program's success, however, depends on finding solutions to important problems like clear licensing agreements, long-term funding, and the active participation of librarians and library consortia in resource management and coordination among stakeholders.

The Indian government began the revolutionary One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) plan in January 2025 with the goal of democratizing access to academic and scientific content across the country. In order to provide faculty, researchers, and students at more than 6,300 government-funded higher education and research institutions with seamless digital access, ONOS obtains national licenses from top international publishers spanning STEM and social scientific topics.

ONOS's primary objectives are:

1. **Equitable Access:** To level the playing field for research and education nationwide, make sure all citizens, regardless of location or financial background, have access to scholarly digital resources.
2. **Cost Reduction:** ONOS lowers subscription fees for academic institutions and libraries by negotiating national bulk licensing, making huge collections accessible and affordable.
3. **Collaboration and Resource Sharing:** By encouraging collaborations between libraries, publishers, and technology suppliers, ONOS lessens institutional duplication and facilitates the cooperative usage and sharing of digital tools.
4. **Improved Learning and Research:** Millions of users' academic achievement, multidisciplinary research, and knowledge discovery are supported by centralized, carefully selected access to important databases and publications.
5. **Digital Inclusion:** By assisting users from tier 2 and tier 3 cities and underprivileged backgrounds in fully engaging in the digital knowledge economy, the project aims to close digital divides.
6. **Streamlined Access and User Experience:** ONOS, which is run by INFLIBNET, aims to provide a straightforward and effective user experience by streamlining resource discovery and subscription management through a consolidated, user-friendly site.

EXECUTION OF ONOS:

The implementation of ONOS directly supports India's national goals for education and research, including initiatives such as *Viksit Bharat@2047* and the *National Education Policy 2020*. Its progress is regularly evaluated by the Anusandhan National Research

Foundation to enhance outcomes and maintain long-term sustainability within the country's academic environment.

Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals play a crucial role in the effective deployment and management of the *One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS)* initiative. Their responsibilities continue to expand across several key areas essential for ONOS's success:

- 1. Policy Development and Advocacy**
LIS experts assist in shaping ONOS-related policies by working closely with government bodies and professional organizations. They promote fair and sustainable access frameworks, negotiate license agreements, ensure copyright compliance, and safeguard user privacy.
- 2. Collaboration and Partnerships**
Smooth functioning of ONOS depends on cooperation among libraries, publishers, and technology providers. LIS professionals coordinate these relationships, help standardize acquisition and sharing procedures, and simplify subscription oversight—thereby strengthening the national research ecosystem.
- 3. Collection Development and Management**
Using their professional expertise, LIS staff evaluate user requirements, select and organize high-quality digital resources, and keep collections updated for diverse academic and research communities. They balance wide-ranging access with specialized needs to enhance ONOS's overall value.
- 4. User Support and Digital Literacy**
LIS professionals assist users in navigating ONOS platforms, conduct digital literacy training, and enable users to find, assess, and ethically use academic materials. Their efforts help reduce digital skill gaps and support effective use of available resources.
- 5. Assessment and Continuous Improvement**
LIS specialists monitor ONOS's performance by gathering feedback, analyzing usage trends, and recommending improvements. Their evaluations ensure that resources stay aligned with institutional and user requirements, keeping ONOS flexible and impactful for India's knowledge ecosystem.

Drawing on insights such as those of Ardit (2021), LIS professionals' active involvement ensures that ONOS delivers equitable, efficient, and high-quality access to information while nurturing a sustainable and innovative academic community nationwide.

SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS OF ONOS:

- 1. Enhanced Access to Scholarly Materials**
ONOS brings together subscriptions for over 13,000 global journals, giving institutions—especially those in smaller cities—far broader access to academic resources than they could obtain independently. This supports nationwide research participation, including in remote and under-served regions.
- 2. Reduced Costs for Institutions**
By negotiating national-level subscriptions, ONOS secures lower prices through bulk licensing. This helps universities and research centers save substantial funds, which they can reallocate to infrastructure, services, or academic programs.
- 3. Shared Expertise and Joint Efforts**
The centralized model encourages collaboration among libraries across India. Staff

can exchange best practices, and collective projects such as digitization, preservation, and resource sharing become easier and more effective.

4. **Better Use of Resources**
ONOS minimizes duplicate subscriptions and ensures that investments in digital resources serve a wider audience. This improves efficiency and helps institutions prioritize essential materials.
5. **Strengthened Professional Community**
Through common training sessions, workshops, and shared platforms, ONOS nurtures a collaborative network of libraries, enhancing professional skills and fostering unity among institutions.
6. **Improved User Experience**
Users gain broader access to digital collections, simpler discovery tools, and more consistent support across institutions. Students and researchers from less privileged backgrounds benefit the most, gaining access to high-quality academic content nationwide.
7. Challenges and Limitations for Librarian and User Communities
8. **Uneven Digital Infrastructure**
Many rural areas still lack reliable internet and robust IT systems, limiting the effective use of ONOS resources.
9. **Copyright and Licensing Complexities**
Negotiating and managing copyright agreements requires specialized skills and can delay implementation due to legal ambiguities.
10. **Financial Limitations**
Even with cheaper national licenses, some libraries may still struggle with upgrading systems or maintaining adequate funding. Concerns also exist over rising costs and long-term financial transparency.
11. **Low Digital Literacy and Awareness**
Many users lack the skills needed to navigate digital academic platforms, especially in underserved regions, reducing the impact of ONOS.
12. **Technical Integration Issues**
Merging ONOS with current library systems may lead to compatibility problems, system failures, or the need for significant operational adjustments.
13. **Gaps in Content Coverage**
ONOS's focus on major publishers might overlook specialized, niche, or regional resources, potentially disadvantaging researchers needing localized or specific materials.
14. **Data Protection Risks**
Ensuring secure handling of user data is essential, and libraries must meet strict privacy standards to prevent misuse.
15. **Impact on Consortia and Publisher Dominance**
A fully centralized system may undermine existing library consortia and increase dependence on large publishers, affecting diversity and innovation in scholarly communication.

ISSUES IN ONOS IMPLEMENTATION:

1. India's vast educational landscape makes it far harder to negotiate a single national subscription compared to smaller countries.
2. Publishers may hesitate to commit to agreements covering such a large and diverse user base.

3. Standardized access may not meet the varied research needs of different disciplines, languages, or specialized institutions.
4. Current publishing models, where authors pay both for publication and access, place financial burdens on scholars and institutions.
5. Many experts argue that India may benefit more from strengthening domestic journals, open-access systems, and printing platforms rather than investing heavily in multinational subscription deals.

OPPORTUNITIES:

1. ONOS can significantly reduce inequality by providing uniform access to top research materials across all institutions.
2. Librarians gain expanded roles in digital content management, user training, licensing, and national planning.
3. The initiative supports skill development in digital literacy, negotiation, and collaborative resource sharing.
4. Institutions can work together more efficiently, strengthening professional capacity nationwide.
5. Students and researchers get better access to current scientific knowledge, fostering a stronger research culture across India.

CONCLUSION:

The One Nation, One Subscription (ONOS) initiative has the capacity to greatly improve equitable access to scholarly content across India, offering particular support to institutions with limited financial and technological resources. By centralizing subscriptions and broadening access to high-quality academic material, ONOS can significantly strengthen the national research environment and promote greater collaboration among libraries.

At the same time, the initiative presents important challenges that must be addressed thoughtfully. The long-term stability of existing library consortia, the need to harmonize diverse institutional procedures, and the demand for trained Library and Information Science professionals are all critical concerns. Skilled librarians will be essential for managing digital content, navigating complex license agreements, training users, and ensuring responsible and effective resource use.

Their continued leadership and adaptability are key to overcoming financial, technical, and organizational barriers. With sustained professional involvement and strong institutional support, ONOS can evolve into a powerful, inclusive model for information access—helping transform India’s academic and research ecosystem and creating more equal opportunities for learning and innovation across the country.

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